WILLIAM BLACK

NOVELIST

WEMYSS REID

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William Black.

WILLIAM BLACK

NOVELIST

A Biography

BY

WEMYSS REID

AUTHOR OF "MEMOIRS AND CORRESPONDENCE OF LYON PLAYFAIR"

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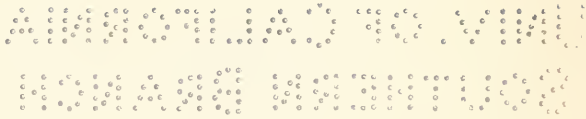

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THESE RECORDS OF THE LIFE

OF

WILLIAM BLACK

ARE INSCRIBED WITH AFFECTION AND RESPECT

TO

HIS WIFE

EVA WHARTON BLACK

PREFACE

I HAVE to acknowledge with gratitude the help I have received from many of William Black's friends in preparing this memoir. The freedom with which they placed at my disposal the letters they possessed calls for my sincere thanks.

To Sir Robert Giffen and Mr. E. D. J. Wilson I am specially indebted for their kindness in supplying me with their personal recollections of Black in his early days. I should like to bear adequate testimony to the debt I have incurred to Mrs. Black, his wife, and to Mrs. Morten, his sister, in writing these pages; but I fear that no words that I could use here would sufficiently express the extent of my obligation to them.

LONDON, *March*, 1902.

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WILLIAM BLACK, NOVELIST

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS

Introduction—How the Public Came to Take an Interest in William Black—His Birth—His Ancestry—Celtic Blood—His Father—School-days—Early Ambition—Death of His Father—First Contributions to the Press—Some Early Friends—Youthful Poems—*James Merle*—A Romance in His Own Life—Last Days in Glasgow.

IN the summer of 1871 the reading public of England found themselves in the enjoyment of a novel and unexpected pleasure. A story called *A Daughter of Heth* had been published anonymously, and had won almost instantaneous recognition and popularity. It was a simple story, almost slight in its plot and construction, and dependent upon two qualities only for the success which it attained so quickly and fully. These were the charm and delicacy of the portrait of the chief character, a French girl suddenly transplanted into a Scottish household, and the fine literary style which the writer of the story had at his command. Everybody who read the book—and almost everybody

did read it—was fascinated by it. No more touching or beautiful character than that of the heroine had been offered for many years to the readers of English fiction. She took instant possession of the sympathies of all who became acquainted with her, and in a surprisingly short space of time she became the rage. But it was not only the public that liked *A Daughter of Heth* and proclaimed its liking in an unmistakable manner. The critics also both liked and admired, and gave expression to their feelings with unwonted frankness. The *Saturday Review*, which was at that time a terror to the literary novice, was in particular conspicuous by the warmth of its appreciation of the unknown writer's story. If it ever showed enthusiasm in criticising a novel, it did so upon this occasion. It followed, naturally enough, that men began to inquire as to the identity of the new novelist, who had not even sought to veil his real name under a pseudonym, but had sent his book into the world to speak for itself in the unabashed nakedness of a nameless title-page. The usual guesses were made, and they were just as wide of the mark as such guesses generally are. For a few months the secret was kept, in spite of the eagerness of the public to unravel it; but at last it came out, and along with it the public learned a pretty little story of the ways of the literary world which had the rare merit of being true as well as amusing.

The reason for the anonymous publication of *A Daughter of Heth* was the fact that its writer wished to get an unprejudiced verdict from the crit-

ics, and, above all, from the critic who dealt with the novels of the day in the *Saturday Review*. In previous ventures in fiction he had been severely handled by that journal, and, rightly or wrongly, he had come to the conclusion that some feeling of prejudice existed against him on the part of its conductors. In this belief, he resolved that his new story should be sent fatherless into the world instead of being weighted with his name upon the title-page. I have already told how completely the innocent stratagem succeeded, and how warm was the welcome which the *Saturday Review* gave to the work of a man whose earlier efforts it had treated with a somewhat savage scorn. When this story became known it was generally enjoyed by the public, and the feeling of interest in the author of *A Daughter of Heth*, apart from the interest felt in his story, perceptibly increased.

His name had been given to the world, and it was known that he was a young Scotsman named William Black, who, after various experiences in London journalism, had, shortly before the publication of *A Daughter of Heth*, joined the editorial staff of the *Daily News*. The writers of literary gossip were then neither so numerous nor so free in their handling of living persons as they have since become; but Black could not altogether escape their attentions when it became known that he had written the most successful novel of the year. They made haste to describe his appearance for the benefit of readers who had not seen him in the flesh. Some of these descriptions were sufficiently amusing and

inaccurate. The best failed lamentably to convey any idea of the man himself. That he was of middle height, slight, and compact of figure; that he had dark-brown hair verging upon black, and remarkably fine brown eyes; that he dressed with great care and neatness, and that he was resolutely silent in mixed society, seemed to be the points upon which these descriptive writers were agreed. They were unquestionably the distinguishing points of the outward man as he was visible to strangers, and they conveyed as vague a sense of Black's true personality as a wax effigy at a fair does of the man whom it is supposed to represent.

It would have mattered very little to anybody whether the descriptions of the new novelist were true or the reverse, if *A Daughter of Heth* had proved to be merely a passing meteor in the firmament of letters. Strongly as people had been attracted by the book, and much as they felt drawn towards its writer, their attraction and interest would have subsided quickly enough but for the fact that *A Daughter of Heth* was followed at no great distance of time by other books stamped with the same indefinable charm and distinguished by the same literary merits. Within three years from the appearance of *A Daughter of Heth,* William Black's name was bracketed with those of the greatest novelists of the day, while he had won his way into the hearts of innumerable readers both in Great Britain and America—not so much by the nervous force and grace of his style, as by the sympathetic insight which enabled him to depict the characters

and temperaments of pure and beautiful women in such a manner as to command universal assent and appreciation. To few writers of modern times has it been given to draw to themselves so much of personal sympathy as William Black secured by these early novels of his. He had not been writing long before there began to pour into his study from all parts of the world that constant stream of letters in which men and women—but women far more frequently than men—told him of the affection he had created in their hearts for the creatures of his own imagination—Coquette, Bell, Sheila—and of the gratitude which they felt that they owed him for the truth and delicacy with which he had made plain to them not the mere outward forms, but the true souls and inward natures of the women whom he portrayed. And not unnaturally this deep interest in the creations of his pen awoke an interest scarcely less keen in the man himself, the writer who, by a gift that had unquestionably something in it of true genius, was able to paint a whole series of beautiful portraits in colors at once so delicate and so vivid. What manner of man was it who could thus unlock the secrets of a maiden's heart and make them known to the reader without shocking the most tender susceptibility? A thousand questions were asked about him in those early days of his great popularity; and a thousand similar questions continued to be asked to the very day of his death; for the hold which he had secured upon the sympathies of his readers lasted through more than one generation, and the desire to know some-

thing of his own life and characteristics continued to the end. It was not a curiosity that was easily satisfied. The natural reserve of the man himself, his absorption in his own thoughts when he was working, and the completeness with which he seemed to sever himself from all connection with that work when his task was for the moment done, made him something of a mystery and a puzzle to all but his closest friends. Even they, indeed, could do little more than guess at the secrets of that laboratory of the mind in which he evolved conceptions of such striking beauty; for only to the very nearest and dearest did he ever make any revelation of himself as a literary craftsman. To the outer world, which could only judge by passing glimpses of the man himself, or by the gossip of the magazines and newspapers, William Black was almost wholly unknown, and the curiosity which was felt as to his personal character remained to the end unsatisfied. It is my hope that in these pages I shall be able to make apparent to the reader the real nature of a man who was not only one of the first writers of his time, and a true king of hearts in the realm of letters, but one of the most chivalrous of human souls, a man who looked upon the world and all things in it from a stand-point of his own, and who for many a long year seemed to those admitted to his friendship to be the very standard of manly honor, tenderness, and good faith. The story of his life, as I have now to unfold it, is in itself simple enough; the story of a brief preliminary struggle, a brilliant success, and continued fame and pros-

perity. But the true portrait of the man himself is a different matter; and it is the real man whom I seek to show to the readers of this volume.

William Black was born in the unromantic thoroughfare known as the Trongate, in Glasgow, on November 15, 1841. His father was in business —not in a very large way; and his first home was one in which a frugal comfort was combined with that sincere regard for culture and for intellectual effort which forms one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Scotch people. But although a native of the great Lowland city and a dweller in its most prosaic quarter, William Black was not of Lowland blood. His father's family belonged to a branch of the Clan Lamont, who in far-away days had quarrelled with their fellow-clansmen, and been driven forth from the Lamont country, under the man they had chosen as their leader, who was known as the Black Clerk, or Black Priest. Hence, one may infer, comes the name of the family. The ostracized clansmen wandered down into Lanarkshire, and settled on a barren, breezy spot known as Carnwath Moor. Here they and their descendants earned such scanty living as was to be made by the culture of small moorland farms. As time passed, the Blacks of Carnwath became noted for their high character, and their devotion to the tenets of their stern faith. The ancestors of William Black were ardent adherents of the Covenant, and in their farm-house near Carnwath Moor they made a secret hiding-place, in which many a fugitive

Covenanter found an asylum. One of the leaders of the persecuted party—Donald Cargill by name —was once hidden in this place for three weeks. While he was concealed there a party of Claverhouse's soldiers, who were searching for him, arrived at the farm-house, and, taking possession of it, examined it thoroughly, even running their swords clean through the feather-beds on the chance of finding the fugitive hidden in one of them. But they failed to discover the secret of his hiding-place, and, after remaining on watch for three days, took their departure. Cargill escaped from the house by night, to find shelter elsewhere. It was from this stock of stern, hard-working, clean-living men that Black came. No one could really understand his character who did not know to what extent it was influenced by the Highland blood in his veins. He had the romanticism of his race; its vivid imagination; its reticence (the necessary weapon of defence in the troublous times when a chance word might so easily have brought a household to ruin); its brooding contemplation of things unseen by the natural eye; and its proneness to rare outbursts of high spirits, when for a season the whole Celtic nature seems to undergo a complete transformation, and in place of the sober, serious man, slow of speech and deliberate in action, there appears another being — joyous, emotional, brimming over, as it were, with the joy of living. This strain of Highland blood was the key to Black's nature, the secret of characteristics which sometimes puzzled his friends.

HIS PARENTS

His father, James Black, was a gentle and studious person, fond of books, and devoted, in the quiet, undemonstrative Scotch fashion, to his children, of whom William was one of the younger. The eldest was a boy named James, while between him and William came a sister, whose character in the coming years was to be drawn for the outer world by Black himself in the person of Queen Tita. The eldest son, James, died nearly twenty years before his more distinguished brother; but some traits of his character were preserved by Black in his portrait of James Drummond, the hero of *Madcap Violet*. Mrs. Black, the mother of the novelist, survived her husband for many years, and lived to see her son William at the height of his fame, and in the fullest enjoyment of his prosperity. Like her husband, she was a devoted parent, and very proud of the talents of her son. It was delightful later in life to hear her talk of the novelist to congenial friends who shared her admiration for him. Transplanted from Glasgow to London, where she found herself amid strange surroundings, she clung naturally to those who had associations with her old home or with similar scenes. But her deep affection for her son enabled her to hold her own in the society of men of letters to which she was introduced through him. Many can remember the fine old Scots lady, whose pride in her boy never betrayed itself in any fashion that jarred upon those around her, and whose shrewdness of judgment led her to select unerringly, among the many strangers with whom she was brought in contact, the men

and women who were most worthy of her friendship. Her mingled simplicity and quickness was a fair indication of the atmosphere of the home in which William Black spent his boyhood.

Black's first school was that attached to the parish of St. James's, Glasgow, where one of his masters was a brother of Alexander Smith, the poet. There is little to be told regarding his school-days. He was a shy, retiring boy, who did not care much for games, and made very few friends. Yet while he was still very young he showed talents which led his father to believe that he would become "a great man." Black himself has written of his school-days in the following words:

I never had any systematized education to speak of; but I managed to pick up a vast array of smatterings—a crude and confused jumble of hydraulics, Latin verbs, vegetable physiology, Czerny's exercises for the piano, and a dozen other things—a perhaps not unnatural outcome of all which was that I found myself engaged at one and the same time on a translation of Livy which was to excel in literary accuracy anything the world had ever seen before; on the formation of a complete collection of British flowering plants—the grasses and cryptograms were a trifle beyond me—and on the construction on paper of a machine which should demonstrate the possibility of perpetual motion. The translation of Livy did not get beyond half a book or so. The perpetual motion machine was never forwarded to the Royal Society; but its phantom on paper at least succeeded in puzzling a good many worthy persons who could only bring against it the objection that in time friction would destroy the mechanism—a puerile and vulgar argument. The scant

herbarium remains to this day, a poor enough treasure-house of botanical lore, but a rich treasure-house of memories—memories of innumerable and healthful wanderings by hill and moorland and seashore, through the rain and sunlight and beautiful colors of the western Highlands. But the chiefest of my ambitions was to become a landscape-painter, and I labored away for a year or two at the government School of Art, and presented my friends with the most horrible abominations in water-color and oil. As an artist I was a complete failure, and so qualified myself for becoming in after-life—for a time—an art critic.

All this refers to Black's very early years, for as a matter of fact his school-days came to an end before he was sixteen. One gets from this passage a picture of the restless boy, conscious of the possession of certain powers which may or may not prove of service to him in after-life, but wholly unable to decide what is the work in which he is most likely to succeed. In those days, like every clever youth, he lived in a world of his own imagining, and, as the foregoing extract proves, was full of schemes and dreams of the most conflicting kind. If he could have had his way he would undoubtedly have become an artist. This was not a mere fancy of his boyhood. His love for art and for the artist's life clung to him to the very end. I shall have something to say hereafter of his friendships with the great artists of his time, and of his intense sympathy with certain artistic movements. It was his passionate desire to take up the life of a landscape-painter. But his experience in the School of Art at Glasgow showed that his strength did not

lie in that direction. Moreover, his father had died, and it was necessary that he should prepare to make a living for himself. So the vision of an artistic career was dispelled. Yet in those very early days in Glasgow he had made one friend who, like himself, desired to become an artist, and who, more fortunate than Black, was destined to have his wish gratified. This was Colin Hunter, now an associate of the Royal Academy.

It was in 1855, when Black was barely fourteen, that his father died. I have briefly stated what manner of man he was. He never gained even moderate wealth—was never what the world calls successful. But he was one of those fortunate men who can enjoy life on very humble means, and enjoy it at least as fully as those with whom fortune has seemingly dealt more kindly. He was never tired of impressing upon his children the fact that all the really good things of life, all the essentials of happiness, are just as freely open to the poor as to the rich. He had an intense love of nature, and delighted to escape from the crowded streets of Glasgow into the country, where he would seek out some favorite spot and quietly study its beauties with observant eyes. Often his children, when they accompanied him in his country walks, saw him, as he gazed on some scene that satisfied his eye, reverently uncover his head, and they knew that he was giving thanks for the beauty that had thus been revealed to him. His love of nature, and his power of observing all natural objects closely, he bequeathed to his son William. Although his

schooling had been no better than that usually enjoyed by the son of a small farmer, he had educated himself so that he could read the Greek Testament, and had even some knowledge of Hebrew. French he had been taught as a boy on the lonely farm at Carnwath Moor, for his mother, with a provident care for the future unusual even in Scotland, had caused all her children to be taught French—in case Napoleon's invading army should find footing on British soil, and they should be deported to a foreign country! The elder Black's religion was deeply tinctured with the melancholy of his race and sect. He had the Puritan's dread of many forms of pleasure that now seem innocent enough, and the world in which his son was destined to play his part seemed to him to be a place of darkness and sin. In literature his tastes were characteristic of the man. He did not positively forbid his children to read fiction, but the only novels he permitted in his house were Scott's, and even these were only tolerated as a special favor. There was little, therefore, in Black's home in his early days to smooth the way to his future calling.

The death of the head of the household led to certain changes in the son's career. He had his own way to make in the world, and, as fortune would have it, his necessities drew him, while he was still a lad of sixteen, into the path which he was afterwards to pursue with so much success. Artist, man of science, scholar—in his youthful way he had tried his hand at all these rôles, and in none of them had he been encouraged by any promise of success.

He turned his thoughts to letters, and almost idly took up the pen which was to be his weapon and tool for the remainder of his life. There is proof of the happy audacity of youth in his earliest contributions to the press. He was scarcely sixteen, but he undertook to enlighten his fellow-citizens and the world at large upon the merits of all the leading writers of the day. Carlyle, Ruskin, and Kingsley were among those whom he set himself to discuss in the columns of one of the Glasgow daily newspapers. It is only those who have passed through a mental evolution such as Black underwent, who will understand how a boy of his age dared to undertake this task. He himself laughed in later years at this ambitious opening of his literary career. "My first essay in literature," he wrote, "took the form of a series of elaborate articles on the chief writers of the day; and these I forwarded, anonymously, to the editor of a Glasgow daily newspaper which is now dead. They appeared, so far as I can recollect, in large type, and in a prominent position; and no doubt the public came to the conclusion that there was something gravely wrong about this or that theory of Mr. Ruskin, or some hidden virtue never before discovered in this or the other passage of Mr. Charles Kingsley, when this important critic pointed these things out." The public did not, of course, know that its teacher, who thus sat in judgment upon the masters of his time, had hardly emerged from the period of short jackets. It probably took the criticism "in large type" quite seriously; but my readers will hardly desire to have it

reproduced here. It is only mentioned, indeed, because it was a stage in the development of Black's character, and because incidentally it influenced his subsequent career. The criticisms upon great writers made a certain impression upon the editor who published them, and he offered the young author an engagement upon the staff of his journal. I have before me as I write a photograph of Black, which dates from about this period of his life. It is one that repays study. The face is naturally rounder and fuller than it was in manhood, and the beautifully moulded mouth has more of the sensitiveness of youth in it. But otherwise the boy's face is one that might very well be taken for that of a man of mature age. There is an earnestness and directness in the expression, indeed, which men as a rule are rather shy of allowing their faces to betray. Perhaps there is something also in the portrait that speaks of the consciousness of strength, and the determination to make use of it. Certainly it is a striking picture, and it helps one to understand what William Black was in those days when, the world before him, he first began to use his pen in order to influence his fellow-creatures.

It was in the Glasgow *Weekly Citizen*, under the editorship of Dr. James Hedderwick, that he next appeared as a writer. Dr. Hedderwick was himself a poet and an essayist, and he was not long in discovering that his youthful contributor, though still in his teens, had "the root of the matter in him." He gave him plenty of work to do on the *Citizen*, and for a time Black went through the regular rou-

tine of a provincial newspaper office, in the days when specialism was unknown, and any member of the staff was expected to criticise a new play or write a paragraph of local news with equal facility. As one who has himself been through this mill of the provincial press, I can testify to its excellence as a means of developing a young man's intelligence, making him observant, quick, and systematic. No better training for a writer could well be conceived.

Sir Robert Giffen has favored me with certain reminiscences of Black which date from this time. "My recollections of William Black," Sir Robert writes, "begin in Glasgow, in the years 1857–60. At that time one of my friends was Mr. John G. Whyte, son of Mr. Whyte, a teacher in Frederick Street, Glasgow, and I was often in his house of an evening. Black, who was then a boy in a short jacket, employed in the *Citizen* newspaper office, was frequently a visitor there, being a family acquaintance. My friend, Mr. John Whyte, was much interested in him as a boy of promise, as he was already writing sketches which appeared in the *Citizen*, which at that time devoted some attention to literature. Even then Black was apt to be somewhat silent and reserved, only occasionally breaking out."

One cannot say that the early work for the *Citizen* gave any real indication of the bent of Black's mind. He wrote sketches of rambles in the country, indeed, that proved that he was already turning the eye of an artist upon the beauties of nature; but there was nothing to indicate the author who was

destined to excite the generous envy of Ruskin by his power of describing scenery. He was doing the all-round work of the journalist, and the chief benefit he derived from it was the power he gained of writing good, nervous English, and of making his epithets suit the objects to which they were applied. By-and-by, however, he struck a new vein of his own. Beneath that mask of reserve which he wore so constantly, especially in his youth, a very warm and susceptible heart was beating, and already his intense sensitiveness to beauty—beauty in natural scenery and beauty in the human face —was beginning to influence him. When he saw a fair face it haunted him, and he invested it with a hundred charms which in most cases existed only in his own imagination. It is not difficult to imagine that the shy, sensitive boy, who so resolutely concealed every sign of emotion from those around him, must have had some painful experiences of his own at this time. His fancy was always following some vision, seen perhaps for a moment only, but remembered long. It was then that there came to him the relief that his nature called for, but which he resolutely refused to find in intercourse with his friends. He began to write poetry. His verses of those days were sufficiently simple and artless. Sometimes they took the form of ballads, in which some courageous action or some dark deed of vengeance was recited. More frequently they were little love songs, recounting the praises of "Lilys" and "Eylomels," who may not all have been imaginary persons, though none of them ever

entered into his real life. It is an easy thing to understand the relief which he must have found in the utterance of his pent-up feelings in this innocent fashion. Every boy who has ever attempted to write has tried his hand at poetry. Black found in his verses a vehicle by means of which he could give vent to that emotional side of his nature which he hid so studiously from those around him. He never pretended to be a poet, but he had a considerable command of the ballad metre, and some of his small poems had decided merit. To the end of his life he continued from time to time to write poetry. Here are some verses written before he was twenty-one, which I cull from the pages of *Hedderwick's Miscellany:*

TO LILY F

O dear little lady, with earnest eyes
Of wondering, beautiful blue,
I see you are struck with a sweet surprise
That we should be looking at you!

You know not the joy which a primrose bloom
Gives to a dweller in towns—
Bringing him visions of sea-dipped gloom,
And fragrance of breezy downs.

You know not the beauty of those blue eyes,
Or the sudden electrical flush
Which laughingly up to your sweet face flies—
Too simple and pretty to blush.

Your father is one of those poets, my child,
Who were born in the woodlands to roam;
Yet why should he sigh after flow'rets wild,
With such a sweet Lily at home?

Gradually, as his pen became more facile, he strengthened his hold upon the local Glasgow press, and established among those who knew him a reputation for uncommon cleverness. That he was distinctly ambitious in a boyish fashion was apparent to all his friends. He was resolved to succeed, and to gain renown in one field or another. He was barely twenty when he began to write his first novel, *James Merle*, which was published in Glasgow in 1864. But even before his ambition had moved him to this effort, he had made himself at home in a little coterie of men—most of them greatly his seniors—who had the same tastes as himself. Among these, no one was more closely associated with him than Mr. Whyte, mentioned on a previous page by Sir Robert Giffen. He and Mr. Whyte, with one or two others, met regularly for discussions upon set themes, some of them of a sufficiently formidable kind. One of Black's earliest letters to Mr. Whyte is as follows:

14th January, 1860.

DEAR MR. WHYTE,—That peculiar little bird, yclept gossip, and which I humbly submit should be called a large bird, has informed me you are coming up on some night next week. If you remember, you got the loan from me, about eight months ago, of a remarkable poem, which I would like you to bring up with you. I have no ambition to have said poem figuring in my works (posthumous edition). I only want to show it to some one, when you may have it back again. I say, isn't the English language a jolly one, that has so many pronouns which don't take a feminine form, like those of the poor devils whom

you are *going* to annihilate! "One" is so beautifully indefinite, and then it doesn't let your correspondent know that you are vulgar enough to be in business, as "party" does.

Will Tuesday night do? I have something in the fire-arm way which will astonish, but of course not frighten you. Yours sincerely,

W. BLACK.

He was in the habit of showing Mr. Whyte any of his compositions of which he was specially proud, and of inviting his criticisms upon them. One other critic he had, to whom he always listened with respectful attention. This was his brother James. For him he entertained not only a deep affection, but a great admiration, and so long as James lived his criticisms, given with the frank freedom of a brother, were always listened to with attention. Mr. Whyte, it is clear, from some letters of Black's which have been happily preserved, was a lenient critic, and could praise generously when he felt justified in doing so:

To Mr. Whyte.

Tuesday.

DEAR MR. WHYTE,—Your letter is one of those things that don't often fall to a fellow's lot in this mundane existence. I dare say you have heard of that meeting of Paisley pawets, in which one speaker rose up and said, "They starve us when we are living, and raise monuments to us when we are dead." Though not aspiring to raise myself to the position of a P. pawet, I am afraid that in my case the affair is to be reversed. Otherwise, you must be down upon me with a cold bath to counteract the evil effects of your letter. As to your liking the descriptive

parts best, it is so long since I read the manuscript that I don't remember of there being anything else in it. The only bit I remember well is that which I liked best—the interview between the handsome *scelerat* (I forget his name) and the girl in the cave. As to putting it into poetry, I could do that with the greatest ease, but Morten swears it wouldn't go down. The idea of that debating club—or whatever name it may go under—ought to be carried out. B. thinks it an excellent idea, as he has had experience of four young men's institutes. Will you look after it? Yours very truly,

WILLIAM BLACK.

The Morten mentioned in this letter was Mr. J. G. Morten, who, in the year 1859, had married Black's sister Wilhelmina. Mr. Morten, though engaged in his profession in London, saw a great deal of Black while the latter was still resident in Glasgow. He was one of the earliest to recognize his talent, and he had a warm appreciation of his character—a character that was not easily to be understood. Mr. Morten will often appear in these pages. All that need be said here is that his unceasing friendship for Black was not the least important factor in the latter's life, and that in many ways Black was indebted to his brother-in-law to the end of his days:

To Mr. Whyte.

Tuesday Night.

DEAR MR. WHYTE,—I make you a fair offer—that you, Bannatyne, and Campbell, if you will, get primed before Sunday three weeks on the question whether literature or art is intrinsically best fitted to elevate the pensive public; which is most permanent; and which is most uni-

versal in application. Regulations: 1. that there be no regulations; 2. that anybody speaks when the spirit prompts; 3. that no beer be on the table.

"Nothing can fairer be."—*Shakespeare.*

"Come one, come all."—*Walter Scott.*

"I won't stand at thy right hand,
Nor keep the peace with thee."—*Macaulay.*

"In Dixie's land
I'll take my stand."—*Archbishop of Canterbury.*

Yours truly,
WILLIAM BLACK.

Among Black's friends at this time, in addition to Sir Robert Giffen and Mr. Colin Hunter, were two young men who were both destined to win distinction in the world of letters. These were Mr. Charles Gibbon, who afterwards won a certain reputation as a novelist, and Mr. Robert Buchanan, who gained fame as a poet and dramatist. With Buchanan he struck up a genuine friendship while they were both residents in Glasgow, and there is little doubt that the example of the brilliant young Scotsman, who made so brave a struggle against fate when, friendless and penniless, he first laid siege to the cruel indifference of London, had no small influence over Black. He never had to endure the sufferings which fell to the lot of Buchanan. His whole course in life was a different one, and he was spared the bitter struggle against want through which Buchanan had to pass before he gained his first success. But Buchanan's friendship and example undoubtedly inspired him in those early days; and when in course of time he

too set forth to try his fortunes in London, it was his old Glasgow friend who was the first to welcome him, and to find a home for him under the roof under which he himself lived.

Buchanan had left Glasgow before the debating club, which Black and his friend, Mr. Whyte, founded, began its brief existence, so that the discussions, of which no record remains, lacked the force that would have been given to them by the aggressive intellect of the author of *The Fleshly School in Poetry*. It is only passing glimpses that one gets through the veil of years of Black's mental occupations at this time; but his letters to Mr. Whyte indicate that he was full of the restless activity of youth, and that he confided all his literary ventures to his friend. The well-known publishers, Messrs. Black, of Edinburgh, had asked him to revise their *Guide to Scotland;* and having accepted the offer—a flattering proposal for so young a man—Black writes to Mr. Whyte to ask him for information about the public buildings in Glasgow. But by-and-by all his thoughts seem to be centred upon the writing of *James Merle*. This story is now out of print, and there are probably but few copies of it extant; yet those who have read it must know that it is a very notable book, and that as the work of a very young man it is remarkable. The wonder is that its promise was not recognized at the time, and that it did not lead its author straight to success as a novelist. The story is cast in the form of an autobiography, and the plot is a very simple one. The hero is the son of a village shoemaker of Eastburn,

a little hamlet some thirty miles from Glasgow. The elder Merle is the most rigid of Puritans, a light of his own sect; and though by nature a gentle and amiable man, impregnated with the dour theology and stern tenets of his creed. His son James commits what is in his father's eyes the unpardonable sin of falling in love with the daughter of the village innkeeper. The poor boy is preached over and prayed over, not only by his father, but by several worthy divines, among whom the famous John Brown, of Haddington, is introduced. Prayers and preachings have, however, no effect in turning the young man from the girl whom he loves. Unluckily for everybody, after an agitating scene, in which old Merle proclaims his undying opposition to a marriage between his son and the publican's daughter, he is struck with paralysis, and seems like to die. Then the son is prevailed upon, sorely against his will, to promise his dying father that he will not marry the girl of his choice unless his aunt, in whose fidelity to her creed the father evidently trusts, should give her consent to his doing so. The story ends happily, the young man, when he finds that his betrothed is fretting herself into the grave, taking the law into his own hands, and boldly relinquishing the promise extorted from him on the plea that it alone could save his father's life. But before this "happy ending" is reached, the hero has to pass through various experiences in Glasgow, and these experiences not only enable the author to draw some graphic pictures of Glasgow life in the middle of the eigh-

teenth century, but furnish an excuse for the introduction of many amusing characters. The strongest feature of the book is the serious spirit in which it discusses various religious and metaphysical questions. There are free references to the prophets and the psalmist. The Bible is, indeed, constantly in requisition for illustrations to the story, and always it is treated in a spirit of genuine reverence. The feeling for scenery, which was so marked a feature of Black's later writings, is plainly visible in *James Merle*, though the author never ventures upon any long flights of descriptive writing, his references to the beauties of nature being as terse as they are effective.

In later years Black never referred to this book, and seemed anxious that the very memory of it should perish. The few friends to whom he gave copies received strict injunctions never to part with the book. I think that its writer would not have been sorry if he had known that every copy was destroyed. Now, though the book was no doubt immature, it was so full of promise, and was so effective in its very artlessness, that there was no good reason, so far as its literary quality was concerned, why Black should have regarded it with disfavor. It seems probable that he disliked it and would fain have removed it from the knowledge of the world because, although it was the autobiography of a fictitious character, it reflected much of the writer's own life. One is allowed to see in its pages the conflict between the artistic temperament of a young man of talent and enthusiasm and the

dreary creed with which Black was made familiar in his youth. The very gravity with which he discusses theological questions, the unfailing reverence with which he alludes not only to the Bible, but to famous preachers like Brown, of Haddington, prove the extent to which his own spirit was affected by his early surroundings. I do not know that there was much in common between James Merle's father, as depicted in the book, and the father of Black; but undoubtedly they held a common faith, and the one must have looked at life very much in the light in which it was regarded by his fictitious double. Black was anxious to forget the book, I fancy, in later years, not because he had any reason to be ashamed of it as a literary production, but because it recalled to him, and laid bare to the eyes of the world, the atmosphere in which much of his early life was spent. The heaven that lies about us in our infancy was, in the case of Black, as in that of so many other Scots youths of his time, a heaven too deeply tinctured with a sombre creed to furnish congenial or sympathetic memories to a man who, in the process of mental evolution, had advanced to another and a more liberal plane of thought from that on which he started. This, I take it, accounted for that curious dislike which Black evinced in his later years to any mention of his first novel.

Both the following letters refer to *James Merle:*

To Mr. Whyte.

DEAR MR. WHYTE,—I am sorry that your criticisms on the last chapter are only too just, but please to remember

that I commenced with a few general observations to the effect that these tea-meetings *were* rather insipid. You could not expect a lot of "vapid women" to talk as the members of Gregory's club; still less could you wish tea-things to be described in the manner of Mr. Ruskin. Unless, indeed, one were to introduce something like *Harvey's Meditations* on a breakfast-table. Nor am I sorry that Miss Burton should turn out a failure. Would you wish to have two paragons in a novel? Surely no. I liked very much that contrast between her and the Eastburn maiden. "Cookies" and "shortbread" *vide* Strang were the characteristics of a tea-drinking. These words are unknown in England, shortbread being called "Scotch cake." In the other matters to be got out of Strang I don't think you will find me mistaken, as I read him up that Sunday night with some care. The quotations from Horace I have never seen elsewhere; nor are they the kind to be placed before the youthful palate in a grammar. I flattered myself that the allusion to Burns was in direct opposition to the vulgar idea, seeing that a man who *could* not drink was not likely to become a great drunkard. I shall, however, go over both chapters again, taking away all "forced" appearances, and smoothing down corners. I would rather have left the advent of the letter-carrier as it was at first (which was merely a suggestion), but I trembled for the extent of the British public's imagination. I shall now put it back as it was. I will either smooth down Jimmie's look, or cut it out altogether.

Dear me! It's all over.

Please don't say anything bad of *this* chapter, for I cannot alter a syllable of it. I have written it at a stretch, and if it is read in bits I'm afraid it will lose what force it may have. A dozen more sentences will finish the book, and our co-partnership will be for the mean time dissolved.

I hope you've enjoyed your part of it as well as I've enjoyed mine, though I was thinking last week of burning the whole affair. I don't think the book would be much the better of being enlarged, as it would probably lose whatever unity now keeps it together.

Yours most truly,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

DEAR MR. WHYTE,—I send you a new introduction for *James Merle*, likewise a picture of the man himself. I have another letter from Chapman Hall, and as I didn't use much courtesy with them they don't spare me. I hinted that *they* might prefer the hero of *Adam Bede* to the hero of *Jane Eyre*, but that *I* did not; neither did I care to write for *such people*. . . . On Sunday I shall bring you C. & H.'s letters.

Yours very truly,

WILLIAM BLACK.

These letters are of interest because they are the earliest evidences of the care with which Black attended even to the smallest details in his novels. They are amusing, too, because of the characteristic vigor with which the young writer defends his work from the strictures of his friendly critic and "co-partner"; while his reference to his correspondence with the eminent London publishers affords a glimpse of his epistolary style in the crude days of his youth. All through his life Black was in the habit of speaking strongly when he felt strongly. The proud independence of spirit which he inherited from his Celtic ancestors did not easily brook anything that he conceived was in the nature of a rebuke. But as he grew older he knew better than to open his

correspondence, even with a publisher, in the aggressive tone on which he seems to have prided himself in his communications with Messrs. Chapman & Hall. It was only when an affront had been offered to him that the hot blood of his race asserted itself, and he expressed himself with a vituperative force that was, to say the least, disconcerting to those against whom it was directed. One need not be surprised that Messrs. Chapman & Hall did not go out of their way to befriend the unknown youth who approached them in so proud and defiant a spirit. *James Merle* found a publisher in Glasgow in the person of a certain Mr. Murray. But it achieved no success, and almost before the ink on its printed pages was dry, its author seemed anxious to have it forgotten. His life in Glasgow was drawing to a close when he wrote the story, and he was about to turn his back upon his youth and the crowded, bustling streets of the great city in which he had first seen the light of day.

Why he at last left his native place and the scenes of his childhood there is no need to tell at length. The story of the episode in his life which led to his setting out from home to face the world is already written in the pages of *Pendennis*. It is the old story of a boy's youthful passion for a woman of the world, of the love of Arthur Pendennis for the Fotheringhay. There is nothing in the story which any friend of Black's can deplore—nothing of which even he, in his sensitive chivalry, can have repented. A woman, somewhat older than himself, and well

versed in the ways of that world of which as yet he knew absolutely nothing, caught his young fancy and, as he believed for the moment, secured his heart. His passion for this lady was pure and beautiful in itself, and he hotly resented the criticisms upon which older people—perhaps not wiser—ventured when they sought to point out to him the folly and hopelessness of his adoration of an obscure actress. Nothing, not even the appeals of his much-loved brother James, and of the other members of his family, could move him. He believed, just as Arthur Pendennis did before him, not to speak of many another whose lot has been cast in the sober domain of real life, that even those dearest to him in his own household were in a conspiracy against him and the woman whose chivalrous and reverent admirer he had become. It was only the act of the woman herself that could cut the knot that bound him to her. Happily, as so often happens in such cases, the woman did cut the knot, and Black was set free from an entanglement in which, though undoubtedly there was some folly, there was no taint of shame. It was his first great disillusionment, and it cut him to the heart. What wonder that after this episode, so commonplace in the eyes of the man of the world, so bitter and tragical to the young sufferer by it, Glasgow became a hateful place to Black. He could no longer tolerate its streets, which spoke to him only too eloquently of a dream that had vanished and a love that had proved false. And Glasgow having become impossible, there was no other place possible but London.

CHAPTER II

BEGINNING OF LONDON LIFE

He Goes to London—Robert Buchanan—Clerk in Maitland, Ewing & Company's—His Love of Children—The *Morning Star*—Work on the London Press—Marriage to Augusta Wenzel—Death of His Young Wife—The Seven Weeks' War—Sympathies with German Life and Character—Mr. E. D. J. Wilson's Reminiscences—Literary Society—The *London Review*—The Whitefriars' Club—*Love or Marriage*—*In Silk Attire*—*Kilmeny*—*The Monarch of Mincing Lane*—The *Daily News*—William Barry—Death of Black's Son.

LONDON was the magnet which drew Black as strongly as it has always drawn the young man of letters eager to make his way in the great unknown world in which fame and power are to be found and grasped by some. It was natural that he should feel that his work in Glasgow was accomplished. It had not been barren work, nor was the field of labor to be called a narrow one. But London, with its boundless possibilities, and its wonderful though mysterious attraction for every ardent young spirit, appealed to him too strongly to be resisted; and so to London he came, to try his fortune in conflict with his equals, and to test himself in the arena in which so few, in comparison with the army of competitors, can, in the end, be counted among the victors. It was at the end of

1863, when he had just completed his twenty-second year, that Black removed from Glasgow to the metropolis. He had gained confidence in himself, and his fixed determination was to stand or fall by his literary work. But he had to reckon first with the prudent mother at home. She believed thoroughly in her son's talent, but she had the untravelled Scotswoman's dread of London, with all its possibilities for good or evil; and it seemed more than she could bear to trust her son to the struggle for life as a man of letters, unless he had something fixed and definite in the way of income to fall back upon. She made it a condition, therefore, of her assent to his going to London that he should not give up his employment in Glasgow until he had found a post with a settled salary in the metropolis. It did not matter to her mind how small the income might be, nor was she specially anxious as to the nature of the work, so long as it was work that an honest man could undertake without doing injury to himself. But work, and settled work, must be found for Black before the anxious mother would assent to his going. The son had a deep affection for the mother, and though the condition assigned was irksome, he was ready to fulfil it, if by doing so he could set her anxieties at rest. But a position in the world of journalism was not one that could be found in a moment; and as by this time Black was burning with eagerness to leave Glasgow, he accepted, as a temporary measure, the first opening that was offered to him, which was that of a clerk in the counting-house of the great Indian and China merchants, Maitland, Ewing,

& Company, of Birchin Lane. The post was humble enough, and the duties, such as they were, far from congenial to the young man of letters; but to hold this modest clerkship was to secure a footing in the great world of London, a place from which to climb to higher things, and Black did not hesitate a moment about accepting it. He travelled all night, as many a Scots lad had done before him, on his fateful journey to the metropolis, and, on arriving there, went at once to lodgings which had been secured for him at Granby Street, Camden Town, in a house in which Robert Buchanan already rented an apartment. Buchanan received his young fellow-countryman in a friendly fashion, and for some time they were not only fellow-lodgers, but fast friends.

Buchanan had been for three or four years in London when Black thus came to reside under the same roof with him. The history of the nineteenth century contains no more tragical story connected with the world of letters than that of Buchanan and his friend and comrade, David Gray, the poet, during their fight with adverse fortune in their early days in London. The story of Gray has already been told. It was the old story of the unequal fight of genius with unkind fate. Buchanan was made of different stuff from the author of *The Luggie*. He was a man who in his later life made many enemies; but even the most bitter of those enemies could hardly fail to do homage to the splendid courage with which he bore himself in a struggle only to be paralleled by the story of Richard Savage.

Buchanan was no weak man to cringe before the hard blows of fortune which fell in swift succession upon him—neglect, indifference, scorn, the pinch of hunger, and the misery of homeless squalor. To him London was, indeed, what De Quincey had found it before him — a stony-hearted step-mother. But step by step he fought his way from starvation to comfort — from an apparently hopeless abyss of obscurity to a wide-spread fame. Whatever may have been his faults, however rash his speech and unsympathetic his temperament, no one who is interested in the calling of letters can refuse to him the meed of honor due to one who has emerged triumphantly from a struggle which must have proved fatal to all but the bravest of the brave. The first severity of the struggle was over when Black, wholly unversed in the ways of the world, came to him to share the modest home that he had made for himself in Camden Town. He had climbed the first rungs of the ladder. He was no longer the shivering outcast whose shelter was a garret and his next meal a problem. It would be base ingratitude if Black's biographer failed to acknowledge the service that he rendered to the young friend of his Glasgow days when the latter, following in his footsteps, came in his turn to try his fate in London. It is true that Buchanan had been not merely an example, but a warning. The little household in Glasgow had heard something of the bitterness of the fight which he had waged before he earned recognition, and the prudent mother had insisted that her son should not expose himself to a fate so hard. Black

was at least secure against want when he began his career in London. But none the less he was deeply indebted to the comrade who had gone before him in the fight, who knew the pitfalls that beset the steps of the novice, and who could teach him from his own hardly bought experience the lessons that every new-comer in the great arena has to learn. Buchanan was a true friend to Black in those days. Their friendship retained its warmth for several years; and then something, something so trivial that no one can now recall it, severed the tie that had bound them together, to the equal loss, I imagine, of both.

It is said that on the morning of his arrival in London, Black was invited by Buchanan, after he had breakfasted, to go out for a walk, in order that he might see something of the great city which he proposed to make his home. To Buchanan's surprise the proposal was declined, on the ground that Black had an article on hand which he felt bound to finish before allowing himself any time for mere recreation. I do not remember hearing a confirmation of this story from Black's own lips; but it is undoubtedly one that those who knew him in his younger days will readily believe. All through his life, indeed, when work had to be done, no thought of pleasure was allowed to stand in the way of its accomplishment. So, on his very first day in London, Black completed the task that he had set himself, before he went out to see the great and famous city of which he had become a denizen. This particular task was, I imagine, one of the articles in

Once a Week which he contributed to that periodical during his later days in Glasgow and his early days in London. A day or two later he commenced his duties in Birchin Lane as a clerk in the export department of Maitland, Ewing & Company.

He was specially fortunate in having among his fellow-clerks a gentleman who was already connected in some degree with literature, and with the writing world of London. This was Mr. R. S. Williams, the son of the Mr. Williams who has earned a place of his own in the annals of our literature, owing to the fact that he was the first person to discover the genius of Charlotte Brontë. He acted as reader in the publishing house of Smith, Elder & Company, and all the world knows the story of how the manuscript of *The Professor* was placed in his hands, and of the impression which it made upon him. A modest and retiring man, leading a simple life in the quiet little house in which he dwelt with his family in the neighborhood of Campden Hill, Mr. Williams was still a person of reputation and authority in literary circles, and it was a happy chance that brought William Black so quickly into contact with his refined and cultivated family circle. Mr. Williams, junior, can recall to this day Black's appearance on the morning on which he first presented himself at the counting-house in Birchin Lane. He was a raw youth, dressed in a rather rough tweed suit, with Berlin wool gloves on his hands, and a hard felt hat on his head—a very different figure from that of the conventional city clerk. But young Mr. Williams had no sooner

set eyes on him than he felt that he was a man of whom he could make a friend. The premonition was true. They became friends at once, and remained so to the end of Black's days. A clerk's life was not, of course, that which Black intended to lead, and the period of his stay in Birchin Lane was reckoned only in months. He was quick to respond to the hints that his friend and other colleagues gave him regarding his dress. The Berlin wool gloves were dispensed with, and he became, in outward appearance, at all events, the conventional London clerk.

A few memories still linger with regard to his career in Birchin Lane. The clerks, when they were working overtime, used to have tea together in an upper room in the house which the partners used for luncheon. The caretaker of the establishment had a little daughter, of whom the clerks made a pet. On the first Christmas that he spent in London—that of 1863—Black discovered in this upper room a little Christmas-tree that the child's parents had provided for her amusement. He proposed to his friends that they should add to the girl's pleasure by burying in the soil in which the tree was planted a few small silver coins. The idea was at once acted upon, and the child enriched accordingly. In later years Black was very fond of playing the same innocent and amiable joke upon children whenever the opportunity occurred. He was in the habit, at one time, of walking in St. James's Park; and here he caused many a little heart to rejoice by the gifts of sixpences and shillings that

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he would secretly conceal among the cloaks and hats that the children had discarded for greater freedom in their play. He delighted, after doing this, to retire to a little distance in order to observe the effect which their unexpected good-fortune had upon the recipients of these tokens of his friendship. He was a very simple-minded youth in those days in Birchin Lane; and Mr. Williams recalls a conversation that he had with him as to the choice of a place of residence when the time came for him to set up a house of his own. He had looked at a map of London, and had decided in his own mind that the Isle of Dogs would be a suitable locality. In the mean time, while he faithfully performed his duties in Birchin Lane, his pen was never idle during the hours that he could call his own. He sent contributions to all the magazines into which he could hope to find admittance, and made the usual attempts of a young writer to gain a footing on the daily press. Sir Robert Giffen's account of him at this period is as follows: "It was in the beginning of 1864, when I was settled in London, that I first saw him after he had left Glasgow. I met him first in the apartments he shared with Robert Buchanan near the Camden Road. I cannot recollect now what his engagements were; but, among others, he was employed by *Once a Week*, for which he wrote a good deal of verse as well as prose articles. My impression then was that he would develop as a poet, as he seemed to have a turn for verse-writing, and wrote with great facility. Previously to meeting him in London, I had heard from him

with a copy of his first separate book, called *James Merle: an Autobiography*, which he had published anonymously, and which I remember noticing in the *Globe* newspaper. Black himself was not afterwards proud of his youthful performance, and did not speak of it; but it was not at all a bad attempt."

It was by something like an accident that the young novelist at last obtained the footing on the press for which he longed so earnestly. One day in a railway train he casually made the acquaintance of Mr. Alfred Hutchinson Dymond, at that time the manager of the *Morning Star*. Mr. Dymond was struck by Black's evident ability; and learning from him that he was anxious for journalistic work, gave him an introduction to the late Mr. Samuel Lucas, who was then the editor of the *Star*, and who was the brother-in-law of Mr. John Bright. Mr. Dymond also introduced him to Mr. Justin McCarthy, at that time the foreign editor of the *Star*. "Black wrote some sketches for the *Star*, in which," says Mr. Justin McCarthy, "we all saw and could not fail to see, remarkable merit; and he received a regular engagement in one of the editorial departments." This, of course, involved the termination of the brief episode of work in Birchin Lane. His work on the *Star* was, at the outset, comparatively slight, leaving him with abundant leisure for the magazine-writing in which he was steadily making his way. How hard he labored at this occupation may be gathered from the following letter to his old Glasgow friend, Mr. Whyte:

To Mr. Whyte.

9 GRANBY STREET,
Monday (1864).

MY DEAR WHYTE,—My conscience has been hurting me with regard to you; but, Lord ha' mussy, what can I do? I have just finished in ten days thirty-eight foolscap folio sheets of MS. closely written (152 pages of a novel), for which I get £10, as Milton, my prototype, got for *Paradise Lost*. Besides this, in the same time I have written an article (see "The Chronicles of My Loves" in the *Household Monthly*), and other performances, until the sight of a blank sheet of paper prompts hydrophobia within me. Nevertheless, here we are! As I asked before, how are all the Glasgow duffers? M—— has given up painting and taken to wood-drawing, which he will find more profitable. (See the "H. M. M." for two or three of his drawings.) C—— has gone into the manufactory of rustic pictures with a will. They call me here the Literary Mangle, but C—— beats me hollow: I think Bob said you had seen my last *Telegraph* paper. My next one I shall send you. What are you doing? Does the Sunday evening class continue? Remember me to all and sundry, and pray for a good summer, that I may see your face under happy effects.

Work of all kinds began to flow in upon Black, as it is apt to do when a man has both adaptability and industry, and is eager to find occupation. While still writing for the *Morning Star*, and contributing regularly to many magazines, he undertook the editorship of the *London Review*, a weekly journal which never came within measurable distance of pecuniary success. It was no more of a success in the hands of Black than in those of his

predecessors in the editorship. It may be doubted, indeed, whether Black had it in him to become a good editor. He was too keenly interested in his own particular subjects to be able to exercise that universal intellectual hospitality which is the indispensable qualification of the born editor. He could not open his mind to receive topics in which he felt no personal interest. For him there were certain realities in life, the chief of which at this period was art. Outside these realities he saw nothing that seemed worthy of his attention, except as a mere means of making money. It may be said at once, therefore, that his editorship of the *London Review* was not a success, nor was that of the *Examiner,* which he undertook for a few months at a later period. But his colleagues on the *Star* had discovered one direction in which his strength as a writer undoubtedly lay. This was his descriptive writing. Wherever he went, he carried with him a keen eye that could see everything that was distinctive or worth seeing in the scene he had to sketch. But he had something better than this power of minute observation. He had the artistic temperament that enabled him to adorn everything he touched. His descriptive writing for the *Star* was illuminated both by the rays of his own fancy and by the light which he borrowed from literature; and even in those early days the reader of the Radical journal recognized the touch of a new hand in its columns, and found pleasure in descriptions that were not merely curiously accurate, but brilliant in color,

and lightened by certain graceful artifices which, at that time at all events, were new in the daily press.

It was while he was rejoicing in the fact that he had secured for himself a permanent income as a journalist that his life entered upon a new phase. He married. He met Augusta Wenzel at the house of Robert Buchanan. She was of German birth—a gentle and amiable woman, for whom Black entertained a sincere affection.

To Mr. Whyte.

9 GRANBY STREET,
Saturday Night (1865).

Bless you, my dear boy, bless you! Now I am proud of you, and am proud to have had even the slightest influence in effecting your conversion. You have done wisely and well, and already the altered tone of your writing is comforting to my parental heart. Seriously, I don't believe you could have made a better choice, and that is saying a great deal in such a matter as marriage. I believe if you had married one of the ordinary, addle-brained, butterfly young women, you would have sunk into a state of perfect indifference in six months, though I believe you would always have been courteous to her, and not quarrelled with her. I am afraid there would be a slight redundancy in my saying anything of Miss ——. You, who are bound in links of the daisy-chain, would scorn an outsider's idea of her graces and excellences. There is only one thing which I, as your father, and looking at your future welfare, must mention. In the conclusion of your note you speak slightingly of bitter beer. I feel insulted. I will not have an old and valued friend maligned; and what I have to say is to make a marriage stipulation that beer will not be prohibited on the premises.

Else how could I and my wife (though she doesn't drink beer) come and visit you in June?

Which brings me to the second head of my discourse. I believe there was a small bet as to whether you or I should be married first. I'll trouble you, *frater meus*, to stump up. If the milliners and other heavenly bodies be propitious I shall be married in three weeks. To whom?

"'Tis a blue-eyed German maiden who hath stolen my heart from me."

A little, graceful, phlegmatic, sensitive, and warm-hearted lassie, who speaks English remarkably well, considering that she has only been a year in England. Her parents and friends are all in Germany, wherefore she and I are going to retire into private life and bury ourselves in the rusticities of Hounslow (thirteen miles from London), if I can pick up a bucolical residence there. I have to get this blessed house and furnish it in three weeks! And if you doubt that this yellow-haired angel has all the perfections under the sun, ask Mr. MacIlawrin. And I send you my warmest benedictions, and I pray you to commend me to Miss ——, and say that I have forgiven her not answering my last letter, written in the prehistoric ages, and I hope you will call down an orthodox blessing on the head of Augusta Wenzel, late of Carlsruhe.

Yours always,

WILLIAM BLACK.

It was on the 8th of April, 1865, that Black and Miss Wenzel were married in Hammersmith Church. His old friend at Birchin Lane, Mr. Smith Williams, acted as best man. That gentleman's sisters had been pressed into his service by the young bridegroom so far as the furnishing of the modest house at Hounslow was concerned.

The time, as the foregoing letter indicates, was brief, and in the end Black's first home of his own was but scantily furnished, though his friends did their best, even to the extent of lending some necessary articles of domestic use which there had not been time to purchase. The day of his marriage was that fixed for the university boat-race, and Mr. Williams remembers how he and the bridegroom drove through the great crowds proceeding to the river-side on their way to Hammersmith Church. In one respect the proceedings at the wedding were distinctly unconventional. Black had secured a very high phaeton in which he and his best man drove to the church. As soon as the ceremony was over he and his young bride climbed into the vehicle, and drove off to their little house at Hounslow, where they spent their honeymoon in peace and seclusion.

That little house was to be the scene of the first great trial of Black's life. He spent some happy months in it with his wife, and those friends who visited them found him engrossed in his journalistic work, but keenly alive to his domestic joys. In the beginning of 1866 a son, Martin, was born. A month or two later the heaviest of all possible blows fell unexpectedly on Black. His wife contracted a fever, which ended fatally on May 14, 1866, barely thirteen months after the ceremony at Hammersmith Church. I have spoken of that reticence with regard to his own inner life which Black had inherited from his Scotch ancestors. It was never more strikingly illustrated than at this period, and five years later, when his little boy followed his mother to the grave.

It would not be seemly to try to lift the veil and peer into Black's heart in those hours of deepest sorrow. He was never one who wore his heart upon his sleeve; and he often seemed to lack the power of confiding his deepest emotions even to those who knew him best. That he suffered intensely in the bereavement which broke up his home and sent him back to the outer world in widowed loneliness was known to all his friends. But they knew it from what they could see for themselves, not from what they heard from his own lips. None of them dared to speak to him of his grief, and in after years he never referred to this early loss of wife and child. But from that time onward he struck a new and deeper note in his writings than he had ever done before. He had drunk deep of the waters of life, and no matter what joy the future had in store for him—and it had much—the world was never again quite the same place to him that it had been before this sore stroke of fate befell him, and he was left, in John Bright's classic phrase, "with none living of his own household save a motherless babe."

Black learned, as so many men similarly placed have learned before and since, that the only assuagement of his pain was to be found in work; so into work he flung himself with renewed energy after the death of his wife and the breaking up of his home at Hounslow. The seven weeks' war between Prussia and Austria was the chief event of the summer of 1866, and he secured a commission from the *Star* to write letters from Germany on the subject. It would hardly be correct to speak of him

as a "war correspondent." Certainly, in the modern sense of the word, he was not that. He did not ride or march with the advance-guard of either army, telegraphing from the field descriptions more or less imaginary of the struggles of the opposing troops. To begin with, there was no telegraphic correspondence from battle-fields in those days; and if there had been, Black was not the man to supply the public with it. What he did during his brief experience in this campaign of 1866 was to follow the Prussian army with the hospital staff in its advance into Austria, and to write descriptions of the scenes he witnessed that were none the less truthful and graphic because in some cases he presented them to the readers of the *Star* under the guise of fiction. He never republished these sketches of a country in the midst of war; but some of them were singularly bright and vivid, and it is not surprising that they attracted the attention of the public, and brought his name into greater prominence among the journalists of the day than had attached to it previously. He was not actually present at the great battle of Sadowa, but he visited the battle-field as soon as civilians were allowed to do so after the fight, and he penned a grewsome account of its horrors. At that time, however, he had not yet "found himself," and he was more at home in writing pleasant little sketches of scenes by the way—in road-side inns, country towns, and railway stations—than in describing the realities of war.

This Prussian experience of his did more than make his name familiar among the journalists of

London. It strengthened his affection for German literature and the German character. One may well assume that his marriage to Miss Wenzel had in itself been at once the fruit and the stimulus of his sympathy with Germany and the Germans. He had been drawn towards their literature while still a very young man. His union with a German wife drew him into close and intimate sympathy wth German views of life. It needed only his experience of the war to make him enthusiastically German in his sympathies, both literary and political. He came back from Prague, where he had his headquarters during the brief but fatal campaign, an ardent admirer of German song, German letters, German music, and, above all, of the German character. Every reader of his stories knows how frequently his sympathies with the great Teutonic nation were allowed to peep forth in his books, and all his personal friends know his affection for those German songs in which he delighted as much as in the ballads of his own country. Thus his Celtic enthusiasm and passion became blended with the steadying influence of the literature and thought of the Fatherland, a rare combination somewhat akin to that which made Heine in his day a representative at once of the Teutonic and the Latin spirit.

It was in this year, 1866, that my own personal acquaintance with Black began. I met him at some function in a provincial town which we both attended as journalists. Accident threw us together, and we spent an hour or more in pleasant talk. He seemed pleased to find that I had heard

his name and knew him by repute, and he received his provincial colleague in all friendliness. What struck me at that first meeting with the man who, in after years, was to be so dear to me, was his air of abstraction. He seemed to have his thoughts absorbed by quite other things than those which were passing around him. His very eyes seemed to be fixed upon the future; and while he talked pleasantly enough on such small topics as our surroundings suggested, his mind was clearly occupied elsewhere. From some one or other—I know not from whom—I had heard that he either had written or was about to write a novel. I was at the age when one is most susceptible to the illusions and enthusiasms of youth; and I remember trying to weigh up my companion and forecast his chances as a novelist. It struck me, as it struck most persons when they first met him, that he was too hard, inelastic, and reticent to be successful as a writer of romance. I was no more able than other people were to penetrate through that mask of reserve which he wore so constantly, or to see the fires of sensitive emotion which burned within. He was dressed in deep mourning, when I thus saw him for the first time, and on his face rested the shadow which told of the sorrow through which he had passed.

Mr. E. D. J. Wilson, the well-known journalist, who had made Black's acquaintance before I did, has furnished me with some pleasant reminiscences of their friendship at this and subsequent periods.

"It was some time in December, 1865," writes Mr. Wilson, "that I first met William Black. He

had then been for a few months engaged as a subordinate in the editorial room of the *Morning Star*, of which Mr. Bright was practically the proprietor, as trustee for his widowed sister, Mrs. Lucas, Mr. Justin McCarthy being the editor, and Mr. Charles Cooper, now of the *Scotsman*, the assistant editor. Black, who was interested in Continental languages, especially German, was occupied a good deal, I fancy, with the foreign news; but he also wrote literary articles and short sketches, in which he displayed a peculiar grace of style. Among the regular members of the editorial staff the principal writers were E. R. Russell (now Sir Edward), afterwards editor of the *Liverpool Daily Post* and a member of Parliament; John Gorrie, afterwards knighted as a West Indian judge; F. W. Chesson, the well-known secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society; Edmund Yates, who wrote a column of social gossip under the title of 'The Flâneur'; and Leicester Buckingham, the dramatic critic. Some younger men, too, had begun to write humorous or descriptive articles in the evening issue of the paper, among them Richard Whiteing and George Manville Fenn. I began myself to contribute leading articles on political and social subjects in December, 1865, and as I became a regular and frequent contributor, I found myself admitted to the inner circle of the office, and often met Black at the five-o'clock tea-table, where McCarthy and Cooper saw their colleagues and talked over business. It was at a rather later date, however, that Black and I became intimate. McCarthy, the kindest and most

hospitable of men, and his excellent wife, were delighted to receive their friends in an informal and unconventional style at their old-fashioned house in Kennington Park. Many of those I have mentioned as connected with the *Morning Star* used to gather around a simple supper-table, and talk or listen long after we had heard the chimes at midnight. Black and a special friend of his, William Barry, a brilliant young Irishman, who had come over from Dublin to edit the *London Review,* were among the frequent visitors at McCarthy's house in 1866–67; and Whiteing, Fenn, Russell, and others, including myself, were constant guests. Sometimes an interesting foreign figure appeared—Louis Blanc, or Gottfried Kinkel—for our host was deeply in sympathy at that time with the revolutionary politics of the Continent. Black and Barry and I often walked away together, and after a while began to project country rambles and little festivities in rural or up-river inns. It was Black, I well remember, who introduced me to the beauties of that delightful stretch of country between Reigate and Guildford, Leatherhead and Ockley. I walked with them alone — it must have been shortly after his return from his brief experience as a special correspondent in Bohemia in 1866—along the Leatherhead and Mickleham Downs on a lovely day in autumn, and I was greatly struck even then by the extreme keenness of his perception of every detail of nature. It was not merely that he rejoiced visibly in the large, picturesque effects of a rolling landscape, or the glowing colors of a sunset among the

hills, but still more that no detail of animal or vegetable life escaped him. It was a real pleasure to be his companion in a walk, for this, as well as other reasons. Though in general society Black, especially at this time, was rather reserved, he was by no means a silent man when with one or two people to whom he could open his mind with an assurance that he would not be misunderstood. On literary questions he was very interesting, and almost always generously appreciative of the work of others, however different from his own. No one read or recited poetry of a certain kind with more feeling and expression. At the time I speak of he occasionally wrote verses himself. Indeed, at a later day he sometimes introduced his own verses into his novels; but I think he recognized very soon that poetic prose was his *forte*. In the early days of my intimacy with him he took much delight in German literature, and in German poetry in particular. This formed a bond between us. His German sympathies are visible in his earlier novels. They became stronger after his visit to the seat of war in 1866, when he was enthusiastically on the side of Prussia, as he was afterwards still more enthusiastically on the side of Germany during the greater struggle of 1870. I never met his first wife, who died early, and left a little boy who soon followed her to the grave. When I knew him first, and for several years after, his mother kept house for him, first at Catherine Terrace, not far from Clapham Common, and from 1872 till 1874 at Camberwell Grove."

As the reader will have gathered from Mr. Wil-

son's statement, Black established himself in the autumn of 1866 in a modest house—No. 4 Catherine Terrace, Lansdowne Road, Clapham—in which he was to reside for several years. Here, to his great comfort, he had the companionship of his mother, who left Glasgow in order to keep house for her son and bestow a mother's love upon his infant child. He himself was very busy at this time, writing for the *Star* and the monthly magazines, editing the *London Review* and enlarging his circle of friends among the journalists and writers of the metropolis. He was beginning in a modest way to figure in the literary world. He had on the stocks the first novel he had attempted since *James Merle*. This was *Love or Marriage*. Writing to his old friend John Whyte, he gives an amusing picture of his life and surroundings at the end of 1866:

To Mr. Whyte.

4 CATHERINE TERRACE,
LANSDOWNE ROAD, CLAPHAM,
Sunday Night (1866).

It is now the witching hour of twelve, when all decent people yawn and wish to go to bed. Yet I remain up, in order to tell you that I forgive you for never having answered my last three or four letters. A variety of circumstances compel me to write to you. Preparing for a journey to-day, I came across some old numbers of *The Citizen*, and there found side by side John Barnacle and Daisy, along with some things of my own that ought to have sent me to a lunatic asylum. Then I had a note yesterday from a young lady you may remember, called ——, and the very handwriting recalled the dismal sights and sounds of Glasgow. But what am I to write about?

Shall I relate to your private ear something about the Bohemian war which dare not be put in print? No; for I have been struck in reading over these *Citizens* with the utter provincialism of the Glasgow people in respect of their indifference to whatever happens abroad, so long as it doesn't affect the sale of cotton. So I think I shall tell you and your wife of a character whom I met the other evening at a little party. You must know that Dr. —— is a very modest, nice little girl, and she it was who brought as chaperon to this small meeting the person of whom I am going to tell you. She—the latter—was an elderly lady of much shortness and stoutness, dressed in bloomer costume, with short gray curls all round her head. She sat down by Dr. Chapman, the editor of the *Westminster Review*, and immediately opened upon him with regard to homœopathy and spiritualism, with a mixture of impudence and naïveté and weak metaphysics which floored him entirely. He was lost. Then she drank a little too much champagne at supper, and, seizing upon a young fellow of great bashfulness—a *Spectator* man—she attacked him about the vices of married women, he blushing horribly all the time. "Why," she said, "how many of your lady acquaintances could you take out with you for a walk of ten miles without laying them up for a week?" "I couldn't do it myself," he said, simply. She said people were improperly matched in this world. All spirits were dual. For her part, she knew hers was a masculine spirit, and that in the next world she would seek out some gentle, effeminate spirit. I suggested to her that this bashful young person might form the requisite affinity, though he privately was of opinion that the possibility was adding a new terror to heaven. Then she diverged into phrenology, and was particularly severe upon the editor of the *London Review*, whom she said she would not trust three inches. But I cannot give you an idea

of the singular appearance of this elderly person, standing with her back to the fire, her arms akimbo, preaching thin Swedenborgianism to the *Star* editor, who looked down upon her with a grave bewilderment. She is no American, but an English woman of some means, and is, unfortunately for her husband, married. . . .

Does Glasgow stand where she did, and the West End Park, and Sauchiehall Street? As for myself, the old literary tread-mill revolves as usual. I have engaged myself for a series of articles to *London Society*, the first of which will appear next month. There will also be a contribution to *Fraser*, Froude says, at the same time. Then I have the German politics of the *Star* to do; "Starlight Readings," etc., etc. Are you coming up to London this summer? We have lots of room for you and your wife. I am going to drive down to Hastings to-morrow with Buchanan and his wife, and may not return for a week or ten days.

Ever yours sincerely,
WILLIAM BLACK.

Another letter of the same period—to Mr. Smith Williams—touches with characteristic brevity and reserve upon some of those deeper problems which always had a strong fascination for Black's mind, though it was but rarely that he could be induced to discuss them, even with his most intimate friends:

DEAR WILLIAMS,—I cannot allow you to remain under the impression that I have edited this week's *London Review*. My first number will appear on September 12th, a fortnight hence. . . . Your idea of a weekly paper full of guts was embodied in the *Chronicle*, which died a few months ago because nobody would buy it. Your idea of a morning paper would die for the same reason.

The difficulty is to give people enough for their penny. A few City men will not make a paper pay.

Your idea of the precocious child is not bad; but you, like most people, are hampered by the unconscious trammels of your early theology. Where did you get that metaphysical idea of a purpose existing before you, and having an interest in your life? How do you know you were "put upon this earth" for anything? Being there, your business is to make the best of life. And here you come into the practical questions of sociology, which tend to show that the best you can do for society is the best you can do for yourself, and that, as a corollary, self-denial and benevolence, though thus derivable from self-interest, are the highest duties and offer the highest pleasures. But these are things not to be disposed of on half a sheet of note-paper. May God give you good health and the rank of general, as the Russians say.

Yours always,

W. BLACK.

P.S.—You will find all that business about the conditions of life treated, so far as I know anything about them, in *Love or Marriage.*

Gradually Black gained a surer foothold in the literary society of London as it existed in that period. His connection with the *Morning Star* in itself furnished him with the means of enlarging his circle of acquaintances. "Among Black's colleagues on the editorial staff of the *Star* at that time," says Mr. Justin McCarthy, "were Sir Edward Russell, now editor of the *Liverpool Daily Post,* who distinguished himself as a debater during his too short career in the House of Commons, Charles Cooper, afterwards editor of the *Scotsman,* E. D. J. Wilson,

now of the *Times*, and the late F. W. Chesson. We had a five-o'clock tea at that time in the largest room of the *Morning Star* every evening, and there we talked over, and made arrangements for, the leading articles and other contributions to appear next morning. I have the most delightful recollection of the talks and discussions we used to have at these gatherings, the encounters of wit and humor, the cut and thrust of argument, the varieties of opinion, and the all-prevailing good-fellowship. Black's wit and humor were as ready as his shrewd judgment was steady and calm." It was not, however, in the *Star* office alone that Black met with the rising pressmen of his day. His connection with the weekly press of London, and with the magazines, opened up to him a wider social field, and, as the instinct of hospitality was strong in the heart of the young Scotsman, he began to gather round himself a circle of his own. From the very first, indeed, it was in his own house that he appeared in the brightest colors. It has already been told how he never shone in mixed society. The presence of strangers too often seemed to chill him or to confuse him. He must, I feel certain, have been thoroughly at home at those afternoon teas at the office of the *Morning Star*. The unforced but never-failing geniality of Mr. Justin McCarthy probably had its effect in leading Black to talk with more freedom at those gatherings than he did elsewhere. Otherwise I should have felt inclined to doubt Mr. McCarthy's testimony to his share in the discussions of those daily tea-parties. In his own house,

however, he was never afflicted by the shyness which troubled him in general society, though even there he was just as well content to be a listener as a speaker; and there were notable people in those days to whom he was privileged to listen. Mr. Swinburne, who made his acquaintance when they were both writing for the *Examiner*, Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton, the late Professor Minto, and many others in the writing world of that epoch were among his friends. Even then one marked peculiarity which distinguished him to the end of his days was manifest. This was the strength of his likes and dislikes with regard to the men and women with whom he came in contact. If he liked a man or a woman he did so with all his heart, and he would wax enthusiastic about the merits of some in whom the outside world had never discovered any special virtue. On the other hand, when he conceived any suspicion of an acquaintance, he did not conceal the fact from his friends; and when his suspicion turned to positive dislike, the emphasis with which he gave expression to his feelings was almost startling. He was not one of those persons, too numerous in this self-seeking world, who can maintain an attitude of smooth neutrality in the face of their acquaintances. And for this very reason he attracted all who could admire a strong nature, not afraid to praise warmly, or to condemn severely, where praise or blame seemed to be deserved. So it followed that in his house in Catherine Terrace he drew around him a little band of friends and admirers who regarded him with feelings of esteem as strong

and positive as those which he entertained for them.

His friend Mr. Wilson, speaking of the days in Catherine Terrace, says: "In the latter part of 1868, or the beginning of 1869, both Black and I ceased to be connected with the *Morning Star*, then near its setting. We saw less of one another for a short time, though, if I am not mistaken, Black wrote sometimes for the *Echo*, on which I had become a leader-writer, under Mr. (now Sir Arthur) Arnold. I think it was about this time that he introduced me to a little dining-club, the Whitefriars, which met at Radley's Hotel in Burleigh Street, long since pulled down. There we met once a week at a mildly Bohemian dinner and a prolonged tobacco parliament. A year or two afterwards, when Black was engaged at the *Daily News* office, he was still a constant attendant at the Whitefriars dinner; but the place of meeting was changed, and, to some extent, the character of the club. I am not sure when it was that Black edited for a short time the *Examiner*, but I think it was during the period between his leaving the *Star* and his entry upon work on the *Daily News* as assistant editor under Mr. Frank Hill, in 1870. The *Examiner*, which had been going down hill from the day that it lost the vigorous guidance of Albany Fonblanque, had absorbed another unsuccessful weekly paper — the *London Review*, for some time edited by Black's friend and mine, William Barry. Mr. McCullagh Torrens, M.P., was for a while the proprietor, and I am nearly certain that it was under him that Black undertook the

editorship—a hopeless and heart-breaking task in the case of such a venture."

The Whitefriars Club is an institution that still exists, though in a somewhat altered form. In Black's day it was a meeting-place for young journalists and men of letters engaged upon the newspapers published in Fleet Street and its neighborhood. Here Black met many journalistic comrades, including Mr. Wharton Simpson, whose daughter he subsequently married. The club dined together once a week in Radley's Hotel, a place that has long since disappeared. The atmosphere of the place may be described as that of a respectable Bohemia, and Black's membership of the club was the closest approach he ever made to Bohemianism. His friend Mr. William Senior, the editor of the *Field*, in recalling some memories of the old days of the club, gives one or two reminiscences of Black.

"In the early seventies I can recall, as among the notable figures around the weekly dinner-table, that of William Black, then assistant editor and art critic on the *Daily News*. He was not a man of imposing stature, but he had a friend from whom he was seldom separated, in the person of a much smaller man—William Barry, a brilliant Irishman. Barry was a genial and duodecimal edition of fashionable humanity, whom we used to chaff on the conquests he was supposed to make among the duchesses and countesses of society. I remember going into the club at Radley's one afternoon to find Barry and Black radiantly discussing a modest pint of champagne. This was such an unusual occurrence for

an afternoon that I bluntly expressed my astonishment, and there and then received a humorous account of how the novelist had made his first good bargain with the firm of Macmillan. . . . It was only in the natural order of things that after dinner there should be gaps in the ranks, for Black and others had their duty to do in Fleet Street; but back they would come again when the work was done. The smartest thing I ever saw performed in journalism was by Black on one of our Friday nights. He had been writing a special article upon some art subject that he supposed relieved him from the leader columns that night; but during dinner intelligence was brought him of some highly important state paper just arrived from Russia. He finished his dinner, and there was the usual interchange of cigars between him, his future father-in-law, Wharton Simpson, and others; and Black disappeared for the space of an hour and a quarter. He had in the interval written a leading article on the relations between Russia and England that was generally quoted next day, and acknowledged to be the best of the leading articles upon the subject." Black's quickness in composition, to which Mr. Senior refers, was one of his chief chracteristics as a journalist. He allowed himself, as he often told me, an hour for a leading article, a column in length, and, so far as literary composition was concerned, there was no slovenliness in what he wrote. But even though he could write faster than most men, he always spoke with admiring envy of the superior quickness of Mr. Justin McCarthy, who never exceed-

ed three-quarters of an hour in writing his column.

On the special occasion mentioned by Mr. Senior, something more than mere quickness in writing was needed. The despatch from Russia was in French, and was written on telegraphic "flimsy" in almost undecipherable characters. Black had to translate the document as well as comment upon it, and he used to say, in after days, that he began at the end, as he felt sure that he would find the pith of the despatch there, and wrote portions of his leader in the intervals between bits of translation. It was really a notable achievement, and showed that he was, in some respects at least, a journalist of first-class ability.

In 1868 Black's novel of *Love or Marriage* was published. It was not, as he himself plaintively asserted when put upon his defence, an immoral book; but it was unconventional and distinctly immature. Its burden was the claim of a man to enter into marriage relations with a woman whom he loved without going through any marriage ceremony. In after-life he disliked to speak of it as much as he disliked any reference to *James Merle*. But there were good things in the book; some, indeed, that were very good, and though it failed to achieve success, and was roughly handled by some of the critics, it gave his friends reason to believe that he had in him the making of a genuine writer of romance. At all events, it inspired Black himself with the determination to devote himself to the writing of fiction as a career. Journalism was the

staff upon which he must of necessity lean in earning his daily bread; but it was to fiction that he turned, not so much in the hope of winning fame or fortune as because, in dealing with the imaginary men and women of his own creation, he found the means of giving utterance to all that was best within him.

Love or Marriage contained some scenes drawn from its writer's experiences as a special correspondent in the war of 1866. He had already learned the value of truth in fiction, and knew how greatly the effect of flights of the imagination is heightened when they are set against a background of reality. All through his writing days, when he described any natural scenery he described only what he saw. One result of this was the fidelity of his later books as pictures of the country in which the scene of each particular story was laid. This feature characterized *Love or Marriage*, and gave the story a certain value in spite of its obvious crudeness.

In 1869 he produced *In Silk Attire*, in which his special gifts were displayed more fully than they had been in either of his earlier works. *In Silk Attire*, though it did not gain the success which it deserved, won for him a larger circle of admirers than he had hitherto commanded. If he did not make money by the book, he at least gained friends, and people began to realize that he possessed in a singular degree the power of making the women of his story charming as well as natural. Some of his readers, indeed, felt that the heroine of *In Silk Attire* was one of the sweetest women who had yet appeared in

modern English fiction; but the reviewers were unsympathetic, and Black's fame as a novelist, though it was now steadily growing, was still limited to a circle at once small and select. If the critics thought that the new artist, who was striving to paint the characters of the women of his time in a way in which they had never been painted before, was a man who could be crushed by their sneers, they were mightily mistaken. There was a dogged perseverance and determination about the young novelist which enabled him to rise superior to their attacks. He had been conscious of the defects which marked both *James Merle* and *Love or Marriage*, and he had, in consequence, been fully prepared for the unfavorable verdict of the critics. *In Silk Attire* was a work of different calibre—a work that struck a different note from any that had been sounded for many a day in English fiction. Black was no more insensible to the merits of this story than he had been to the faults of its predecessors. He did not for a moment allow himself to be chagrined by its failure to achieve the success it deserved. Indeed, he had begun to write *Kilmeny* before *In Silk Attire* was published. He had found his vocation, and not all the lions of criticism that glowered in his path could turn him from it. He had, of course, the sweets along with the bitters of his position. Nothing is more grateful to the young author who has not yet tasted the intoxicating delights of fame than the knowledge that his work has made for him friends and won for him admiration, though the circle of friends and admirers may still be small. The

author of *In Silk Attire* was recognized by those who knew him as one of the rising novelists of the day, and he went on his way with unfaltering courage.

Nor did Black lack encouragement of a peculiarly gratifying kind even in this early and unsuccessful venture of his. Mr. Williams, senior, whose claim to the possession of unusual literary insight had been proved beyond dispute by his recognition of Charlotte Brontë, favored him with the following generous appreciation of his work:

TWICKENHAM,
March 6, 1869.

MY DEAR MR. BLACK,—I must thank you for the great pleasure your new novel gave me, and congratulate you on the success you have made: indeed, I think you have taken a high position as a novelist, and one which you may maintain, if not improve, by the qualities you show in this story. These seem to me to be the clear, manly style, free, yet finished; the vivid descriptions, picturesque and truthful in their characteristic brevity; especially the scenes in the Black Forest, which show a poetic appreciation of the beauties of nature and artistic skill in depicting them. In other scenes—those of stage-life—the same power of realizing them by means of their salient characteristics is shown, and the absence of all that is coarse and prurient does not prevent the picture being complete and suggestive. The plot I put aside: it is only serviceable to bring out the characters in critical situations, though I could wish it had been less improbable. But the characters are so human and lifelike, and talk so naturally and not too much, that, combined with the boldness of their position and purity and delicacy of the love scenes,

they evidence to me dramatic power and skill of no common kind. The incidents appear actual, and the touching tenderness and simple pathos of some of the scenes, and the brightness and beauty and nobleness of others, all alike witness the healthy, vigorous tone of mind of the writer and produce the charm of the book. I only speak in general terms, being invalidish, and my brain as flaccid as my hand is shaky. Excuse this scrawl, and believe me, with best wishes for your further success,

Yours very truly,
W. S. WILLIAMS.

This was praise, indeed, and it gave Black comfort and courage. The striking truth of this appreciation is clear to everybody now. Mr. Williams, with the eye of the true critic, saw in the immature production he was called upon to criticise the germ of the special qualities which distinguished the later and more finished works of the same pen. Encouraged by such recognition as this, Black set himself the task of writing at least one novel a year.

To Mr. Whyte.

5 LOWER TERRACE,
TORQUAY.
(1870).

MY DEAR WHYTE,—You talk to me of Scotland—to me, who am at Torquay, in the heart of Devon, opposite the bluest bay in the world, with cliffs of rock over three hundred feet high running out into the sea—not into a brackish canal, as the mountains of Gourock do. However, I forgive you, as Hennie Watson used to say. I saw no announcement like that you speak of; but as I had thought of calling the book *The Wild Flower of Devon*, the publishers may have indiscreetly let that drop. I am

glad you find some little interest in the first instalment. I was afraid it was rather dull, being wholly introductory. *Kilmeny* I know you will like, as it is almost exclusively devoted to artist life at home and abroad. I wish I had a copy here; I would send it to you. If I remember rightly, I have only one copy at home. I hope to see you this summer or autumn. I have an invitation to go shooting in the autumn, but may have to go sooner to see some places for a Scotch story which I purpose writing by-and-by. I hope you and yours are well. Why don't you bring them all down to the South for a month, instead of going to Gourock? If I could only tell you half the loveliness of this place, you would be off here at once; but in heaven, where I am at present, one ought not to talk prose. A military friend of mine describes the occupation of an angel as "sitting on a damp cloud and playing a harp." I haven't one by me at present. Did you see the *Westminster Review* on *Kilmeny?*

Faithfully yours,
WILLIAM BLACK.

P.S.—I wish you would tell me if you ever heard of any character in any Scotch story going under the sobriquet of "The Whaup."

It is the postscript to this letter that is most interesting. *Kilmeny*, which deals chiefly, as Black said, with artistic life, and the scenery of which is laid in London, Brighton, and Buckinghamshire, had just been published. It had increased the circle of his readers and admirers, and the distinct charm which pervades its pages had even touched the hearts of the critics—with one or two notable exceptions. Men began to recognize the fact that the new writer had a gift of his own, and that he

could describe natural scenery and the natures of women with a skill and delicacy that made them vivid and real to the reader. His success, partial though it was, nerved him to a fresh effort, and he was already contemplating the writing of the romance in which The Whaup is one of the central figures—a romance which was to place him at one bound among the most popular novelists of his time.

Romance writing had not, however, led him to neglect his every-day work as a journalist. During these years, from 1866 to 1870, he had been working hard in his profession; and though he never rose to a front place in it, he had made a steady advance in the esteem of his fellow-journalists, and had secured a substantial income as the result of his industry. It may, perhaps, be said here, as somewhere it ought to be said, that Black never had to pass through any period of severe and sordid struggle as a man of letters. From the time when, still a mere boy, he threw up his modest post in the counting-house in Birchin Lane, and trusted wholly to his pen for a livelihood, he never failed to make a sufficient income. Keenly susceptible to those pleasures and luxuries which only the wealthy can afford, he was quite content, while his means were modest, to live frugally. The thought of debt was hateful to him, and he always lived within his means. But with each succeeding year his means grew larger, and he found himself taking rank among the most prosperous journalists of the day. In 1870 his position in the newspaper world was substantially

improved by his acceptance of an important post on the editorial staff of the *Daily News*. Mr. Frank Hill was the editor of the *Daily News* in those days, and Mr. (afterwards Sir John) Robinson the manager. Political writing was no more to Black's taste than it had been at any previous period in his career, but his great capability as a writer, and the quickness of application which he had acquired as a journalist, enabled him to fulfil his duties as assistant editor and leader-writer on a great morning paper with sufficient credit to himself. His heart, however, was in other work. It was a good thing for him that the *Daily News* in those days paid more attention to literature and art than any other morning paper, and he delighted in the opportunity he now had of expressing his views upon these subjects in the columns of the great Liberal journal. That which he did not like—in fact, frankly detested—was the responsible work that fell upon him as assistant editor. He felt the burden of that work most heavily when the editor was absent, and he had to take his place at the helm. It was there that his own weakness as a politician—a weakness due exclusively to his deficient interest in political affairs and controversies—was most apparent.

As the years passed, his compulsory connection with this side of journalism became more and more irksome to him; and when the day came for him to escape from the toil of political writing he was as unaffectedly happy as a boy released from school.

At the outset, however, he hailed his connection with the *Daily News* with pleasure. It gave him

at once a position of some importance on the press, while it liberated him from the necessity of miscellaneous writing, and thus set him free to devote himself more fully than had been possible before to his calling as a novelist. The engagement on the *Daily News* at the same time brought him into contact with new circles, and enabled him to form new friendships. One friend of those days has already been mentioned by Mr. Wilson, and he must not be passed unnoticed, for he filled for several years a large part in Black's life. This was William Barry, a young Irish journalist, who served long afterwards as the model for Willie Fitzgerald in *Shandon Bells*.

To the day of Black's death a large photograph of Barry hung above his writing-table in his own room at Brighton. His friends were sometimes puzzled to account for the warmth of his regard for certain persons; but no one who knew William Barry could be surprised by Black's affection for him. He had the wit and the sympathy characteristic of the Celtic temperament, while he was happily free from the strain of melancholy which sometimes accompanies that temperament. He had a touch of genius. He was an enthusiastic student of nature, and he was a most loyal friend. It was not a bad thing for Black that at the most critical period of his career, when he was passing from the cold shade of obscurity into the full blaze of a fame and popularity that but few writers are permitted to attain, he should have had the friendship and companionship of such a man as Barry. The sim-

plicity of character and the love of harmless fun which distinguished Barry made him an admirable companion for a man who suddenly found his feet treading the slippery path of unaccustomed fame. The reader will see by-and-by in what spirit Black accepted the astounding popularity which in the end burst upon him in so startling a fashion. I think that his friend Barry helped him not a little at a time when it would have been easy for a man to fall a victim to the intoxication of a bewildering success. If Barry helped Black in those days, the latter nobly repaid the debt a few years later, when he watched over Barry on his death-bed like a brother, and ministered to him to the end.

Mr. Wilson, speaking of the *Daily News* connection, says: "In 1870 Mr. Hill became editor of the *Daily News*, and Black almost immediately joined him as assistant editor. His friend Barry at the same time became a frequent contributor to the same paper on subjects connected with sport and natural history. I met them often together in those days, in clubs and elsewhere, but notably at Mr. Justin McCarthy's, who had then returned from his first visit to the United States, and had revived his pleasant little Saturday evening supper-parties at rooms in Bedford Place. There we used to gather during the exciting summer which was marked by the outbreak of the Franco-German war. Among those whom we used to meet most frequently were Mr. and Mrs. Kroeker, the latter a daughter of Ferdinand Freiligrath, a poet for whom McCarthy, as well as Black and I, had a warm

admiration. We were all, or nearly all, ardent in the German cause. I remember that Black joined enthusiastically in singing the 'Wacht am Rhein' on the night when we got news of the first French defeats on the frontier. I knew nothing directly of Black's work on the *Daily News*, being occupied in a different region of journalism; but, like all his friends, I noticed with amazement that his literary production was most rapid and brilliant while the nightly burden of the newspaper rested upon him."

Kilmeny, as has been told, won many friends for Black among the reading public, and especially among men of letters. His next effort was not so happy. This was *The Monarch of Mincing Lane*, in which he utilized some of his early experiences in the house of Maitland, Ewing & Company. Perhaps it was the uncongeniality of those experiences that made the record of them in this novel less sympathetic and convincing than either of his previous efforts had been. At all events, the public did not care for *The Monarch of Mincing Lane*, and even kindly critics thought that it showed a falling off from *In Silk Attire* and *Kilmeny*.

Black himself, I am inclined to think, shared the public view of this performance. It was one of the books from his pen about which he never allowed himself to be drawn into conversation, and during his lifetime it was never republished. Yet successful or the reverse, he went straight on to his appointed end. He had scarcely completed the writing of *The Monarch of Mincing Lane* than he began the book which was to gain for him a world-

wide reputation and establish his position as a writer high above the reach of unfair criticism.

The writing and publication of *A Daughter of Heth* marked the turning-point in his career as a novelist, and I must leave this part of the story to a new chapter. Before I close the present page in the history of Black's life in London, one tragical incident must be recorded. This is the death of his son Martin, to which I have already alluded. The boy passed away on the 29th of March, 1871. It was another terrible blow for the father. The little memorial card which was sent to Black's friends to record the close of the brief life says simply that the child "made many friends by reason of his bright looks, his frank and winning ways, and gentle disposition." Black bore his sorrow in a stony silence, infinitely more pathetic than any loud outburst of grief would have been. He went about his usual work, reserved, impassive; he spoke to no one of his pain, and his friends did not venture to allude to it. But those who were closest to him then knew how deep his suffering was, and understood and respected his characteristic determination to keep it locked within his own breast.

Some seven years had now elapsed since the young Scotsman came up from Glasgow to try his fortunes in London. They had been years, as the reader has seen, of varied experiences. He had married and he had become a widower; he had seen his house, even in the loneliness of his great bereavement, brightened by the presence of the boy whom he loved devotedly, and he had found himself left in it

childless. But besides these personal experiences which made his early years in London forever memorable, he had behind him the record of seven years of steady work, as full in its character and as arduous as any to which a young man has ever devoted himself. He had been merchant's clerk, journalist, essayist, editor, novelist, and in each successive stage he had done his best, throwing into the work of the day, even when it was least congenial to his tastes and temperament, all the stubborn energy which was characteristic of one side of his nature. And if he had not yet achieved any brilliant success, his seven years of work had been seven years of steady, continuous progress. He had gathered about him friends of whom he had every reason to be proud; he had made within certain limits an honorable name for himself in journalism and in letters. No man could have had less reason to regard his career so far with feelings of shame or regret. And he was still young, with an undiminished confidence in his own powers, and already preparing for a fresh attempt to gain the ear of the British public.

That he had changed much during those seven years all his friends saw. It would have been strange, indeed, if the great sorrows of life of which he had partaken so freely had not left their permanent mark upon him. He was no longer the unsophisticated youth who had entered the counting-house in Birchin Lane seven years before. He had gained enormously in his knowledge of life and of the world. His friends had seen him develop from the boy into the man, wise from a varied experience

of life. They had seen, too, how quickly he had adapted himself to his new environment. Glasgow lay far behind him; he had taken his place in the larger social world of London. The wonderfully observant eye, which was so quick to note every new feature that presented itself, had served him in his dress, his home, his daily surroundings. He had become to all outward appearance the polished man of the world, breathing with ease an atmosphere that differed widely from that of his simple, early home. But whatever else had changed in those seven years of toil in London, his heart was what it had ever been, his nature was still pure and chivalrous, and his ambition, like his temperament, had undergone no transformation. He had measured himself with the men and women of the great world, who had seemed to him so formidable when seen afar off—the journalists, and poets, and wits, and bright particular stars of the literary circles of the English capital; and he had found that he could hold his own even with the best of them. Above all, he had discovered that beyond all dispute he had the gift of winning the sympathy of those to whom he appealed with his pen. He had touched the hearts of men and women, and made them throb responsive to his own. It was still the day of small things with him; but he had been tested, and had not been found wanting. It was with a firmer step and an assured confidence in his own capacity that he went forward upon the next stage of his journey.

CHAPTER III

"A DAUGHTER OF HETH"

The Writing of *A Daughter of Heth*—Coquette—The Real Whaup—Letters to Mrs. Kroeker—The Popular Verdict—A Dazzling Success—Black in Society—*The Strange Adventures of a Phaeton*—The Real Trip—Friendship with Artists—At Camberwell Grove—A House-warming—Engagement to Miss Simpson—Dedication of *The Phaeton*—Visit to the Hebrides—A Curious Episode—Mrs. Kroeker's Reminiscences—A Valentine—*A Princess of Thule*—Death of William Barry.

IN a letter to Mr. Whyte, which I have printed in the last chapter, Black mentioned that he was going to see some places in Scotland for a story that he was about to write. The places in question were in Ayrshire, Saltcoats being the particular spot that he visited; and the story which he contemplated writing was *A Daughter of Heth*. All Black's admirers know the leading feature of this delightful tale: the presence of a French girl, brought up to French views of life, in a Scottish household of the typical kind. No situation could have been more happily conceived than this for the purpose of giving Black's peculiar talents full play. Up to this point his strength, so far as it was displayed in his stories, had been found in his admirable descriptions of scenery, the clear and natural talk which he put into the mouths of his characters, and, above

all, the sympathetic insight with which he painted the portraits of his women. His weakness had displayed itself in his plots, which, as Mr. Williams pointed out in the letter quoted on a previous page, were altogether secondary to his characters and descriptions. Many of his friends believed that if he could but invent a good plot he would secure at once the place which he ought to hold among the novelists of the day. But Black had a hatred of violent dramatic incidents, which clung to him throughout his life. It was life as he saw it that he wished to depict, not the life of melodramatic adventure dear to so many writers of fiction. "People are not always committing forgery, or bigamy, or running away with other men's wives, or being falsely accused of murder. I do not know that I ever met any one who had passed through any one of these experiences, and I would rather write about men and women like those whom I have actually known than about imaginary monsters I have never seen." Such was the view of his art that he once expressed to me, and it was in strict accordance with this view that, after the false start of *Love or Marriage*, he pursued his course as a novelist. But if novels are to interest the average reader, it is necessary that they should deal with incidents and situations that attract—in part, at least—by reason of their novelty. The central situation in *A Daughter of Heth* was of this character, and it enabled Black to put forth all his strength. Various accounts have been given of the way in which the incident of Coquette's presence in a Scottish minister's house-

hold first suggested itself to Black. It is not improbable that the theme of *A Daughter of Heth* may have occurred to him from an incident which really happened about this time—the visit of a young lady, Irish by birth, but a resident in Paris, to some friends in Scotland. This young lady was a friend of Black's, and there is no doubt that she told him of some of the amusing incongruities between herself, fresh from Paris and its ways of living, and the unsophisticated Scottish household in which she was temporarily resident. This incident, I say, may have been the germ of *A Daughter of Heth*, but in any case the treatment of the subject was Black's and Black's alone, while Coquette was absolutely a creature of his own imagination. Here and there, it is true, some trait in her character may have been drawn from some woman whom he had actually met; for in his silent way he was always studying the people whom he encountered in real life, and making mental notes of anything about them that struck him as being distinctive or characteristic. But no one can claim to have served as a model for Coquette. His mother did, indeed, see in her something of the young wife who had been taken from him after so brief an experience of domestic happiness, and it may be regarded as certain that Coquette's death was a reflection of that other death at Hounslow which had brought desolation into his first home. But those who knew Black's first wife declare emphatically that, although graceful and gentle, there was nothing about her of the special charm that has endeared Coquette to a vast multi-

tude of readers in all quarters of the world. *She* was the child of Black's brain, and it is only by seeing the offspring of that brain that one can form an adequate estimate of its quality. Perhaps I may go further. Coquette is no mere effort of a strong intellect striving to impress the world with a new and brilliant creation. Love, as well as intellect, inspired that delightful portrait of innocence, simplicity, and tenderness. Coquette was as much the child of Black's heart as of his brain.

As for the other characters in the story, they belong mainly to the earlier period of Black's own career. He turned his back upon the London of commerce and of Bohemia, forgot the literary and artistic circles in which he moved from day to day, and went back to the simpler scenes and less complicated personalities of his youth. The setting of the story, as we have seen, was sketched from nature. Black's father and mother are in part portrayed in the minister and the old house-keeper, while I have a shrewd suspicion that The Whaup was none other than Black himself. Indeed, he did not deny it when I taxed him with it. The story of how I came to do so may amuse my readers. Turning over a photographic album in his house one day, I found an early portrait of Black in characteristic Scotch costume — cape, cap, leggings, baggy breeches. "This your portrait, Black?" I exclaimed. "Why, then you must be The Whaup!" He smiled a little grimly, but did not dissent from my remark; and a little later on he admitted that the incident told in the story, in which the masterful Whaup holds his

brother head downward from the bridge, and keeps him in that uncomfortable attitude until, at the peril of his soul, he uses a wicked word, was one in which he himself had played the part of the criminous hero.

The writing of *A Daughter of Heth* absorbed all his thoughts at a time when the world at large was engrossed with greater affairs. The Franco-German War, that struggle of giants, which the seniors of this generation justly regard as the greatest epic of their lives, was shaking the very earth in its furious course while Black, in his little room at Catherine Terrace, was weaving the delicate and tender love story that was to make him famous. He was a journalist, seated in the editor's room of a great London daily, and he had, in consequence, to deal every day, and almost every hour, with the tremendous incidents of the swiftly moving drama on which mankind gazed fascinated and terror-stricken. Those who remember that time can bear witness to the fact that few of us had any thought for anything but the battle-fields of Lorraine and the girdle of steel round Paris. Yet Black had the power of shutting out the outside world, even at a moment like this, from his mind. He was as much absorbed in the story of Coquette as though no war had been carried to the very borders of the English Channel, and no spectacle like the downfall of the Second Empire had been presented to our wondering eyes. This power of absorption in his own work and his own imaginary world was one of the most striking of Black's characteristics. He had possessed it

even in his boyish days at Glasgow, and it grew stronger almost to the end of his life; but its existence was never more strikingly demonstrated than in his writing of *A Daughter of Heth* during that time of titanic convulsion. The real world for Black during those months of labor was not the world in which one empire fell and another sprang into being on the battle-field, but that in which Coquette lived her pure and simple life out to the end.

The story was published originally in the weekly edition of the *Glasgow Herald.* It had admirers while running its course in that journal, but it was too delicate in character, too fine in execution, to suit the tastes of the majority of the class among which the weekly *Herald* circulated. At any rate, though it was praised by some discerning readers, it did not add a single copy to the number of *Heralds* that were sold, and not a word was said about it during its serial publication by any of the critics. Black had, in short, no evidence from the outside that *A Daughter of Heth* was likely to prove more successful than his earlier stories. But he knew the truth about it, and he, who had been the severe critic and judge of his own earlier work, was convinced in his own mind that he had now produced something that was almost equal to the standard he had set before himself. Accordingly, he resolved that he would use this new book for the purpose of that experiment upon which he had determined when stung by the acrid sneers of the *Saturday Review* at a Scotch writer who had the presumption

to write English novels. Anonymously the story had been published in the *Glasgow Herald*, and anonymously it was given to the world when reproduced in 1871 in the orthodox three-volume form. Among Black's friends at this stage of his life was Mrs. Kroeker, the daughter of the distinguished German poet, Ferdinand Freiligrath. For the poet Black had a great admiration, and between him and the poet's daughter a cordial friendship sprang up. I am indebted to Mrs. Kroeker for permission to use some of the letters that Black addressed to her:

To Mrs. Kroeker.

"DAILY NEWS" OFFICE, LONDON,
May 12, 1871.

DEAR MRS. KROEKER,—In order to explain to you why I cannot accept your very kind invitation for Sunday, I am going to let you into a profound secret. In a few days there will be published a novel called *A Daughter of Heth*. There will be no name on the title-page—but hush! Let us dissemble! "*Ich habe es gethan*," as Müller said. So you will understand that at the present moment I am up to the eyes in proof-sheets. Have you a library at Forest Hill? The chances are that the young person I speak of will make her appearance there in a week or ten days; and if she should be dismayed and abashed by the splendor of the Forest Hill ladies, who seem, especially on Sunday at eleven, to have a most gorgeous and exceptional variety of colors in their attire, I hope you will, with your usual kindness, take her by the hand and endeavor to reassure her. She is not a wicked young woman, although you may think so by that Scriptural reference, and I shall prove the catholicity of your sen-

timents by your reception of her, for she is—I regret to say—French.

When this business is over, and when this cxnfxunxed (is that vague enough?) weather has passed off, I hope to make a visitation on you some Sunday morning. I hope you got home safely from the Friedensfest, and that the autocrat whom you bless with a capital "T" in "tyrant" was not more tyrannical than usual in view of your taking him away from the awful orgies which followed. What I chiefly remember is Dr. B. howling for tons of beer (after our drinking champagne out of tubs at half-past seven in the morning). It was a quarter to nine in the morning, and I will add this, that an Irishman and a Scotchman "saw out" all your countrymen who sat down to the banquet. It is all the result of bad habits I have acquired since they made me a member of the Kunstverein. Pray give my kindest regards to Mr. Kroeker, and tell him how fortunate he is to have some one to take him away from those haunts of tobacco and wine which some of his friends—through a weakness of resolution—are unable to leave until they have laid the basis of a headache. Still, I must say this for the Turnhalle liquor, that it was so good I had no more sensation next day than if I had merely taken a squencher at Simpson's in Oxford Street. Doubtless, you don't know the place—but no matter.

Faithfully yours,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

May 20, 1871.

MY DEAR MRS. KROEKER,—I tear my hair with rage. First, I was asked to go to the Kunstverein on Thursday. Couldn't. Then, by a friend of Pauline Canissa, to go to hear that celebrated young person make her début at the opera. Couldn't. Then, most attractive of all, you offer me the pleasure of an evening at Sydenham, and

the answer is still the same—Can't. I am thrown back on the question, "What is the value of life?" Last evening I had a holiday, and spent it in as stupid a fashion as is imaginable—although a very usual one with some unfortunate people who have nothing to do. That is to say, I dined with a friend at a club, smoked, played billiards, and had a headache in the morning. The headache was from the billiards.

I am really very sorry that I cannot get down, but as you talk of seeing the MacCarthys, I suppose you and Mr. Kroeker will be back before "red autumn dies amid the winter mists." Give my love to all the pretty young ladies you see on the Rhine steamers—English or German, it is no matter—and pray remember me very kindly to your papa and mamma when you see them. The *Daughter of Heth* was kept in-doors by the east wind longer than was expected, but I hear she has taken her walks abroad to-day. Best remembrances to Mr. Kroeker, and with all good wishes for your voyage,

Believe me,

Yours very faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

LONDON,

May 31, 1871.

MY DEAR MRS. KROEKER,—I am sorely afraid I shall not have the pleasure of seeing you before you go to Germany—I see before me such an appalling series of occupations. So I must wish you and Mr. Kroeker a "Glückliche Reise!" May you be attended with the pleasant weather which seems now to have set in; and I hope your friend the cuckoo will say good-bye before you go. *Love or Marriage* is not immoral—well, it is hard to say what meanings the Brompton D. may not have found in it—but it is crude and harsh, and dull, which

is worse. Don't read it. Bret Harte is excellent; but if you have the book, pray look again at Jim. I think the force of the verses is wonderful. Kindest regards to Mr. Kroeker and yourself.

Faithfully yours,
WILLIAM BLACK.

For a few weeks after its first appearance the fate of *A Daughter of Heth* hung in the balance. But then, as it were in a moment, the reading world awoke to a consciousness of the fact that a notable addition had been made to English fiction, and that a writer had appeared among us who could touch the hearts of his readers as if with the magic wand of genius, compelling assent, even as he compelled the unwilling tears to rise to the eyes of hardened men and women of the world. And, strange to say, the first trumpet-note proclaiming the verdict of the critics on its author was that which was sounded by the *Saturday Review*. Black's innocent stratagem had succeeded beyond his wildest hopes—succeeded so well that it was always thereafter with a certain touch of penitence that he referred to the little deception he had practised. Probably he was wholly in error in the belief that some personal feeling existed against him on the part of anybody connected with the *Saturday Review*. But every man of letters who has had to submit to criticism knows how easy it is to fall into such an error. Black himself did not judge his earlier works so favorably that he could feel quite certain that the unfavorable judgments of others were inspired by personal malice. But whatever may have been

the truth regarding the past, the *Saturday Review* had now atoned nobly for any wrong that Black had suffered at its hands. There was both knowledge and sympathy in its review of *A Daughter of Heth*, and appreciation of the most generous and spontaneous kind. And in those days the approbation of the *Saturday Review* was a passport to fame. Men might, and did, succeed without it, but once having gained it, they succeeded more quickly than by any other means. A chorus of praise, loud and earnest, was raised by the whole press as the reviews of *A Daughter of Heth* appeared in one journal after another; and then, to the approval of the critics was added something still more precious, the ratification of their verdict by the reading world. In that summer of 1871, when men and women turned, sated and horror-stricken, from the woful tale of carnage and misery in France, they found a most welcome relief in the perusal of the simple story which told with such delicacy and pathos the episode of the sojourning of Coquette in the household of the Scotch minister. It is only once or twice in a decade that any work of fiction meets with instantaneous and universal acceptance. This was the happy fortune of *A Daughter of Heth*, and when the secret of the authorship was quickly discovered, Black found himself raised in a moment to the position of a literary lion. He was on the crest of the wave, the sun shining upon him with almost dazzling brilliancy. It is a dangerous position for any man, and it is one which no man is permitted to occupy for long. Happy are those who can meet

this sudden change of fortune, with its attendant blaze of fame, with modesty and self-control. Happy, too, are those who realize that the first flush of a glorious success is something that can never be repeated. Only once in any man's lifetime can he experience the delight which public recognition after years of obscurity brings with it. Black's friends of his early days were almost prouder of the manner in which he bore his sudden and dazzling success than of the success itself. William Barry, who was one of those who were nearest to him at the time when *A Daughter of Heth* changed his career and his place in the world, was never tired of dwelling, with the generous appreciation of friendship, upon the fact that Black remained absolutely the same after he had won his reward as before. But the change in his circumstances was very great. Before the publication of *A Daughter of Heth* he was merely one of a large body of almost unknown writing-men in London in whose futures their friends had confidence, but whom the world had ignored. A few weeks after the book appeared everybody was talking about it and about him, and his friendship was sought as an honor by men and women from whom he had seemed but lately to be absolutely cut off. He enjoyed the sudden change, of course, as who would not have done so? It meant much more to him than the dubious pleasures of celebrity. Hitherto he had certainly not enriched himself by his labors as a writer of fiction. If the truth were to be told, in fact, he had sacrificed a portion of his income as a journalist in order to devote himself to

the work to which he felt himself specially called. Now he knew that he had gained a position in the world of letters that made his writing of value from the purely mercenary point of view. If he had suffered in his younger days from the business keenness of the publishers, and their doubts as to his success, he was in a different position now. A few years later he could exclaim with something like exultation: "I have my foot upon their necks; it is they who must come to me now, not I who have to go to them." This was not, of course, the case immediately after his first success. But already *A Daughter of Heth* had made him a man of mark, for whose next piece of work enterprising publishers competed eagerly. That he keenly enjoyed this side of success is certain. It freed him from all pecuniary anxiety, and it enabled him to satisfy that craving for beautiful things and a life of luxurious refinement which he had always had. He was no sybarite. He was at all times the most conscientious and industrious of workmen, never sparing himself when work had to be done. But he had an unfeigned liking for fair surroundings, for a beautiful home, and for the recreations which no wise man who takes an all-round view of life undervalues. Hitherto his pleasures had necessarily been comparatively simple and inexpensive; now, with an increasing and assured income, he was able to spread his wings and indulge in flights that had been forbidden to him before. His house was no longer furnished in the simple style that had sufficed at Hounslow. He bought pictures. He became a

wonderful judge of cigars, never smoking any but the best (this was perhaps his only extravagance). He joined a West End club, and he dressed with an attention to the fashions of the hour that sometimes disconcerted those who looked upon him with reverence as a great prose-poet, and who had expected to find that he had the indifference to such small things as clothes and personal appearance which is supposed to be the traditional characteristic of men of genius. I do not think that any one will think the worse of Black because of these traits in his character. They were part of his nature—the complement of those rare gifts which enabled him to discern all the beauty of the clouds and the morning skies in a mountain land. Nay, I think that they were also the complement of that wonderful power of his that enabled him to read a woman's nature with an almost unerring intuition, and to make that nature perceptible to others by an art so skilful that its mechanism was always imperceptible. But whether his love of "the good things of this life" was a virtue or a fault, it undoubtedly existed, and no faithful biographer can ignore the fact.

It does not follow, however, that there was any real change in Black's spirit because of the change that gradually took place in his outward appearance and surroundings. To the very last there was a curious note of simplicity about him that contrasted forcibly with the conventional conditions of his life as a man of the world, admitted as of right to the most exclusive circles. He was in the world, but

he was never quite of it. He acquired with great quickness the art of talking the jargon of society. But it was always plainly a foreign language on his tongue; and he was never really at home in that brilliant London society which, after the appearance of *A Daughter of Heth,* was but too glad to open its doors to him. The truth was that in his heart he was quite unspoiled. If he felt it to be right to conform to new conditions of life very different from those which he had known in his boyhood and his first years of journalism, he was never forgetful of the old ways and the old friends. Thus, while he accepted with frank satisfaction the change in his position which gave him access to comforts and pleasures that only the wealthy can afford, he clung as closely as ever to his old friends, and was happier in their society than in any other.

I have said that he was never quite at home in what is known as society. As a matter of fact, that which he least enjoyed among the fruits of his brilliant success was the social prominence that was forced upon him. He had always been a social creature, and he could not, as some men of genius have done, take refuge in absolute seclusion from the increasing social pressure which comes in the train of notoriety. He loved to go among his fellow-men. He delighted in watching the clash of intellect with intellect, in listening to the talk of men and women, and in studying human character in all its aspects. He was almost fascinated by the strange, unfamiliar phases of life that were opened to him when he was enabled to pass from

the pleasant, unceremonious circles of Bohemia to the great drawing-rooms of Belgravia, where he breathed the atmosphere of a social life more complicated, and in the conventional sense more elevated, than that which can be found anywhere else in the world. But if it fascinated him, it troubled him also; and too frequently, when he had been invited to some great gathering where beauty and rank and wealth gladly welcomed talent, he would stand a silent spectator of the show, observing everything, but saying nothing. If he appreciated the success that had opened this new world to him, it was not because he found personal pleasure in the scenes to which he was now admitted, but because they afforded him the opportunity of studying new phases of human life and new types of character. One may well believe that while outwardly he looked the very embodiment of the man of the world as he stood in the crowd in some Mayfair festivity, inwardly he knew that an impassable chasm divided him from the company around him. It is pleasant to recall once more the testimony of his friend Barry, with whom his lot was at this period of his life so closely intertwined, and to know how little the change of outward circumstances had affected Black's heart or turned his head. In the great essentials of character and disposition the author of *A Daughter of Heth* differed not at all from the writer of the unsuccessful *Love or Marriage.*

There was one special point in which the Black of 1871 was identical with the boy who had come to London seven years before. This was in his re-

solve not to loiter by the way, not to waste in pleasure the precious time which might be spent in work. No sooner were his hands free from the task of correcting the proofs of *A Daughter of Heth* than he began to prepare for his next venture in fiction. This was *The Strange Adventures of a Phaeton.* The reader will have gathered from his letters to Mrs. Kroeker that he was at this time seeing a good deal of the German colony in London. I have already told how deep were his sympathies with German literature and the German character. His marriage had strengthened them, but it was not until, through the friendly influence of the Kroekers and other German residents in England with whom he became acquainted, he was admitted into full participation in the mysteries—occasionally a trifle too jovial—of *Kunstvereins* and *Turnvereins,* that he gave full vent to this side of his feelings. He had not been so much absorbed in the writing of *A Daughter of Heth* as not to know what was happening on the Continent, and he had been filled with admiration for the fine qualities which were displayed by the German soldiers during the invasion of France. Some of these same soldiers came over to London at the close of the war, and he met them in the houses of his German friends. The result was that he determined to make the hero of his next story a German—an imaginary person, of course, but one in whom the solid virtues of the national character were to be embodied. It is not impossible that he was the more anxious to do this because the heroine of his last story had been a Frenchwoman.

The framework of this new romance had the great merit of originality. I cannot say how it first occurred to him to pack the characters of a novel into a phaeton, and to send them touring along the highways between London and Edinburgh. Some of the classics of English fiction deal with adventures *en voyage*, and this fact may have suggested the plan of the new book. There is another and a simpler theory which is, I imagine, nearer the truth. He had his annual holiday from the drudgery of the newspaper office in Bouverie Street to take. He was very fond of driving, and it occurred to him that there could be no pleasanter holiday than a driving tour through England; and then, being always anxious to make the best use of his opportunities, the thought occurred to him that he could accumulate materials as he went along for incorporation in his new book. Such, I venture to think, is the true story of the genesis of the *Adventures of a Phaeton*. At all events, in the early summer of 1871 he started on a real phaeton trip of his own through the scenery which he afterwards described so vividly in his story. But although the origin of the story may have been prosaic, those who knew the author are aware that the romance of his life is written in this book—the striking freshness and novelty of which, when it began to appear in *Macmillan's Magazine*, at once secured for him a new world of readers and admirers. The relations of the *Phaeton* to his own life and the light which the story throws upon his methods of work are so great that the book requires more than passing notice here.

THE REAL PHAETON DRIVE

For some time past he had been in the habit of taking long drives in the country surrounding London in a phaeton which he hired from a job-master in Holborn. Sir Robert Giffen recalls Black's coming more than once to his house in Pembroke Road in 1871, and taking him and his wife out for a drive through Richmond Park or some other pleasant suburb. It was when driving on one of these occasions, with Mrs. Giffen seated beside him, that he told that lady of the success of *A Daughter of Heth*, and of the prospect which was now opening before him. When he resolved to take his long drive through England, he asked the Giffens to be his companions, but business engagements made this impossible, to the lasting regret of Sir Robert. He then turned to another old friend, his colleague in the counting-house in Birchin Lane, Mr. R. S. Williams, and secured his companionship on a journey which was destined to become famous in literature. So far as the phaeton trip itself was concerned, the description given by Black in the story may be taken as absolutely accurate.

Even the first détour, when the phaeton was taken to Twickenham, after leaving London, was an actual fact. The simple reason for this preliminary jaunt to Twickenham, before the North Road was taken in earnest, was that Mr. Williams happened to be staying there, and, to save him the trouble of coming up to town, Black undertook to call for him at his summer quarters. Together then the two young men set off, and together they remained until the end of their holiday. The drive to Edin-

burgh took just three weeks. There is no need to give any description of it here, for has it not already been described by a master-hand? But some of my readers will be interested to know that the real journey, of which they have read the story as transmuted in Black's imagination, was absolutely without incident or adventure of any kind. They spent three placid, almost monotonous, weeks upon the road. Mr. Williams, who has artistic tastes and skill, occasionally sketched a face or a bit of scenery. Black had with him a small note-book, in which he entered day by day the brief memoranda that he was afterwards to expand so freely. Their great pride, when they had reached Edinburgh in safety and brought their phaeton journey to an end, was that the horse which had carried them so far was in as good condition as when it started from Holborn. Black, who had driven the whole way, was not a little satisfied with this achievement, and when the pleasant holiday came to a close, he and his companion were in the placid frame of mind that proved that they had enjoyed themselves. They returned to London by train, and forthwith the novelist began to prepare his materials for the new story. His advance in the world of authorship was proved by the fact that Messrs. Macmillan made overtures to him for its publication, and expressed a desire to make it the serial in their magazine for the following year. They were, I believe, somewhat startled when they learned that the new romance was to be set in a topographical framework, and they would have preferred a novel of a more orthodox character.

My own recollection of what Black told me of his dealings with the Macmillans on this point was that he removed any scruples they had as to the publication of the *Phaeton* in the magazine by undertaking to let them have, when it was completed, a genuine romance.

But now a romance of his own began to be woven about him. Before I refer further to the story of his engagement and marriage to Miss Eva Wharton Simpson, some of the letters relating to the period immediately following the phaeton trip may be introduced:

To Mrs. Kroeker.

"DAILY NEWS" OFFICE,

November 2, 1871.

MY DEAR MRS. KROEKER,—Could you conveniently send to 4 Catherine Terrace a copy of Mr. Freiligrath's *Prince Eugen, der edle Ritter*, by Saturday morning? I make this bold and sudden, not to say impudent, request, because I should like to say something about it in the first number of my *Macmillan* story. If you will please send it to me I will faithfully return it next week—as sure—as sure—as sure as anything. In great haste.

Most faithfully yours,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

December 4, 1871.

MY DEAR MRS. KROEKER,—Amid your multifarious duties could you find a moment to look over the accompanying proof, and tell me how many mistakes there are in it on every possible feminine point, and whether Prince Eugen is fairly indicated. Have I to thank you for a very neat and handy edition of your volume of translations?

I suppose so; and send you my warmest thanks for it. But why didn't you include *Prince Eugen* among your own translations?

Ever faithfully yours,
WILLIAM BLACK.

The Strange Adventures of a Phaeton began to appear in *Macmillan's Magazine* in January, 1872. The story attracted attention in the first instance because it was written by the author of *A Daughter of Heth*. When it was found that it was not a romance of the conventional kind, there was some disappointment among Black's admirers. Indeed, the first instalment of the tale produced a feeling of bewilderment in many households. It was so novel in its form that many readers were puzzled by it, and were wholly unable to arrive at any conclusion as to its real nature. Was it to be the mere record of a driving tour, with a thin thread of story thrown in to bind the different scenes together, or was it to develop into a real romance, of which the scenery was merely to be the background? It was with a good deal of hesitation that his readers received the first instalment of *The Phaeton*, and, if one may judge from contemporary criticism, with some disappointment also. But the story had not gone far before the doubts and fears aroused by its opening pages were completely dispelled. Then, the very freshness of the style and manner of treatment gave an additional impetus to the favor with which the new story was received by the public, and everybody began to read and talk about the wonderful

phaeton and its occupants. But Black's admirers soon began to resolve themselves into two schools. His descriptive powers were now first revealed to the public. Here was a man who with his steel pen could paint the cloud scenery of a gorgeous sunset or some fair landscape bathed in the mellow light of noontide, with all the richness, the fulness of color, and even the vague suggestiveness that distinguished the brush of Turner. The art was almost a new one in English literature. Even Mr. Ruskin in generous praise admitted that this young writer had done things that he could never attempt. No such landscape painting, no such vivid impressions of the shifting shapes and hues of the morning and evening sky, had ever before adorned the pages of our literature. If *The Strange Adventures of a Phaeton* were to prove only a guide-book in disguise, then assuredly it was such a guide-book as we had never possessed before. But as the serial ran its course in the magazine it was seen that only half its charm lay in these wonderful descriptive passages, glowing with color and brilliant with atmospheric effects such as had never before been rendered in English prose. It had the other charm of delightful character sketching. The men and women to whom we were introduced were few in number, but they were real, and they included two women who at once seized the fancy of the British public, and held it even as Coquette had done before. Some of the young author's admirers gave unstinted praise to his descriptions of our English scenery, and said but little of the story and char-

acters of the *Phaeton*. Others found the story charming in its freshness and brightness, and such characters as Tita and Bell a distinct addition to the great portrait gallery of fiction. Thus, as I have said, Black's admirers became divided into two classes, and the division was never wholly effaced in later years. It was, I think, the *Phaeton* which first gained for him the sympathy and admiration of the artists of his time—a sympathy and admiration which he possessed in a greater degree than any of his contemporaries in the world of letters. The reader knows what Black's first passion in life had been. His whole ambition had been to gain power and fame as an artist, and most of his friends in his early years had been men of like tastes with himself. He had been drawn from the pursuit of art by the necessities of life, and his career as a journalist had thrown him into a different circle from that which has its centre in the Royal Academy. But his heart had always been true to his old love; and now, to his unfeigned delight, he found that he had done with his pen what he never could have accomplished with his brush, and had secured the recognition and admiration of the whole artistic world of London. The great artists of his time eagerly sought the acquaintance of a writer who could make beautiful landscapes arise as if by the touch of a magic wand before the eye of his reader. Not a few of them confessed that they learned much from Black's pages. That he had himself the eye of the artist was evident, and so he was taken into the artistic fellowship with that characteristic warmth

and generous recognition which have always distinguished it. From this time henceforth he became one of the most familiar figures in the art circles of London, and some of the closest and most intimate friendships of his life were those that he formed with distinguished painters who welcomed him not only as a kindred spirit but a fellow-artist. The literary critics who watched the story of *The Phaeton* as it was unfolded in the pages of the magazine could not, of course, be expected to discern the remarkable technical merits of Black's descriptive writing. Mr. Ruskin did so, and was warm and outspoken in his praise; but then Mr. Ruskin was an artist as well as a writer. To the purely literary critic, that which gave to Black's description of scenery its special charm was the vein of poetry that insensibly, as it were, ran through all that he wrote. If the artists saw that he had the eye and almost the hand of a painter, the literary critics felt that he had the soul of a poet.

It was early in 1872, when the success of his new story had been established, that Black left his little house in Catherine Terrace for a residence of greater pretensions in Camberwell Grove, called Airlie House. Here he established himself in the midst of surroundings which at the time were almost rural in their character. He had a great house-warming party in the characteristic Scotch fashion, and he invited his friends from far and near to celebrate the occasion.

"Yes," he writes (March 14, 1872) to Mrs. Kroeker, "we shall be comparative, or even superlative, neigh-

bors, and you, being a lady, will be as positive, I suppose, as circumstances require. I hope you will be able to induce Mr. Kroeker to bring you over to our 'house-warming'—an ancient and venerable Scotch institution, which begins at nine with the drinking of whiskey, is continued through ten, eleven, and twelve with the drinking of whiskey, and ends at three in the morning with the drinking of whiskey and the singing of 'Auld Lang Syne.' I think we shall be ready to contemplate that climax in about three weeks."

A month later he writes to the same lady, the date of the party having been fixed, "Whiskey will be on the table at 9.30. Could you persuade Mr. Kroeker to bring up 'Prinz Eugen,' and let a degenerate English race hear what a soldier's song is? If you can get a train to Denmark Hill Station, you will find this place the second thoroughfare east of the station."

Mr. Wilson, who afterwards bought Airlie House from Black when he gave up a permanent residence in London, writes as follows:

In 1872, when Black settled at Airlie House with his mother, he had a house-warming party, at which his health was proposed by Mr. Alexander Macmillan, the publisher. To Black the neighborhood, then unspoiled by the builder's "effacing fingers," had an old-world charm. The fine old trees, the quaint houses and cottages, the relics of the time of which there is an interesting record in Ruskin's *Praeterita*, when Denmark Hill, Camberwell Grove, and Dulwich might be called rural rather than suburban; the irregular open spaces, and the comparative absence

of traffic, pleased him. He liked to show his guest the splendor of a sunset in Grove Park, or the moonlight of early summer shining upon the fine chestnuts of the Grove. But it is rather difficult now to recognize the scenes he painted in *Madcap Violet*. In later years I often spoke to him about the changes that had passed over the place since we knew it first. He winced at the thought of seeing it in its altered state, and after he left Airlie House, at the end of 1878, when I took over the lease from him, I was not often able to induce him to pay his old home a visit. Yet he always had an interest in the house where the early years of his happy married life were spent, and where his surviving children were born.

One of Black's fellow-members at the Whitefriars Club was Mr. Wharton Simpson, a journalist like himself, though connected with the scientific and technical portion of the press. In 1869 Black first met Mr. Wharton Simpson's only child, Eva. He did not see her again until the beginning of 1872, when he was writing the early chapters of *The Phaeton*. He met Mr. Simpson and his daughter in Oban—a place which for the rest of his life was very dear to him. He travelled with them for some time, and before the summer was over he and Miss Simpson were engaged to be married. It was no secret to his friends—and Black himself, laying aside his usual reticence, freely admitted it—that Miss Simpson had suggested to him the character of Bell, the heroine of *The Phaeton*. This was the wife whom he chose for himself in the maturity of his powers and the full flush of his newly acquired fame. When I have said where Black's own sketch of the char-

acter of the woman who was his helpmeet and companion, his constant friend and mainstay and comforter for the remainder of his life, is to be found, I have said enough with regard to one whose union with Black was in every sense of the word "the marriage of true minds."

In the early summer of 1872 Black went up to the Highlands to study the scenery for his next story, *A Princess of Thule.* His companions during part of the journey were Mr. Wharton Simpson and his daughter.

To Mrs. Kroeker.

IMPERIAL HOTEL, GLASGOW,
Wednesday (1872).

MY DEAR MRS. KROEKER,—Look at that! I am on my way to Ultima Thule, and if you sometimes suffer from the sea, you will be pleased to learn that I have a seventeen hours' voyage by sea just staring me in the face. I am bound for the Butt of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, and if ever I come back you shall all be told of my experiences in that land of rain and desolation. I should have been otherwise very glad indeed to have accepted your kind invitation, and to have made use of it to impress on your husband that the man who would lift his hand against a woman—I mean who would limit her to four dresses on going abroad—deserves what he is very likely to get. Pray convey my compliments to him all the same.

Bon voyage to both of you.

Faithfully yours,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

"DAILY NEWS" OFFICE,
October 2, 1872.

MY DEAR MRS. KROEKER,—I have indeed something to tell you. . . . Did you ever hear of a person called Bell? That's *her*. While I was in Scotland she and her papa came up to Edinburgh, and I undertook to escort them through the country, and she had sprained her foot, and so we merely continued the adventures of a phaeton until they reached this very strange and curious climax. Did I point out Bell to you at Denmark Hill? She was there, at all events, but I hope to have an opportunity of presenting her to you more personally. But she is very shy as yet, and a little frightened at meeting any of my friends. But it is strange how folks get accustomed to such things. Now!—that is what I have to tell you. . . .

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

The 2d of October, on which the above letter was written, was, as it happened, Miss Simpson's birthday. Black had pushed on the completion of *The Strange Adventures of a Phaeton* in order that it might be ready for publication in three-volume form upon that day; and, in spite of those delays of the printers which are even more vexatious and persistent than the delays of the law, he was fortunate enough to be able to send his betrothed a copy of the book on her birthday. It contained the following epistle dedicatory:

TO E. W. S.—I look back on a journey which was made pleasant by the fancy that you might have been with me. I look forward to another and longer journey rendered

beautiful by the hope that you may be with me, and I find this book between. What can I do with it but lay it at your feet, and ask you, as you look over its pages, and smile at the distorted vision of yourself you may find there, to forgive the rude and graceless outlines that were meant to portray one of the most innocent, tender, and beautiful souls God has ever given to the world. The blind man, who has never seen the stars, dreams of them, and is happy. And if he should be cured of his blindness, and get to know the stars, and become familiar with all the majesty and wonder of them, will he look with much contempt on those imperfect pictures of them he had formed in the time of his loneliness and ignorance? I think not; and that is the excuse I have for offering to you this book, knowing that you will look charitably on these gropings in the dark, for the sake of the love and admiration that prompted them.

I have said that the purpose of his visit to the north of Scotland was to study the scenery of the Hebrides, in order to introduce it into the novel he now had in view. He stayed at the Garranahina Inn, in the island of Lewis, and studied the scenery and the varying effects of sunshine and cloud with the care and minuteness that distinguished him as an observer of nature. He went fishing, too, on Loch Roag, and here caught his first salmon—a notable event in the life of a man who for many subsequent years devoted a considerable portion of his time to this sport. As I have mentioned Garranahina Inn, I may at this point touch upon the story that the innkeeper and his daughter were the prototypes of the King of Borva and Sheila in the *Princess*. This was a story widely circulated during

Black's lifetime, and repeated even after his death. It probably originated at the time when *A Princess of Thule* was at the height of its popularity, with some foolish tourist who, having visited Garranahina and learned that Black had stayed there, jumped to the conclusion that he had not only introduced the scenery of the place into his story, but adopted the landlord and his daughter as the two chief characters of the book. This statement, sufficiently ridiculous on the face of it, was absolutely unfounded. More than once in later years Black's friends have heard him refer to it with anger and contempt. It is not necessary, however, to dwell upon this idle fable further. If it had not obtained currency in those newspapers which delight to supply personal gossip about celebrities to their readers, it would not have been mentioned here. But as the tale found wide acceptance at one time, it is only just to Black himself that his indignant repudiation of it should be put on record. As a matter of fact, there was never any doubt among his friends and intimates that if there were any living prototype of the delightful princess she was to be found in the lady who had also been his model for the heroine of *The Strange Adventures of a Phaeton*. She was certainly not the young woman whom Black only remembered as having once or twice waited upon him at table.

It is one of the drawbacks to such a celebrity as that which Black had gained, that all manner of myths are woven around the name of its possessor. Like other men who have suddenly been raised to

a place of eminence, he had to discover for himself the thorns from which no laurel crown is wholly free. The idle gossips of the newspapers now began to make free with his name in a fashion that he hotly resented. One of these writers of vague and vulgar personalities, for example, described him as coming into some West End drawing-room attired in "faultless evening dress"; and he was so angry at the impertinence that he positively wrote to the *Athenaeum* (if I remember aright) in order to protest against it. Hitherto he had enjoyed the freedom of comparative obscurity. Now he had fallen a prey to the parasites who fasten upon anything in the shape of notoriety. The phase of modern journalism which is represented by the publication of the private affairs of living persons he regarded with the utmost detestation. A journalist himself, he had high views both of the dignity and the responsibilities of the press. It was in no small part owing to what he regarded as the deterioration of the press that he gradually withdrew himself from the society of journalists. His old friends, it is true, always remained the same to him; but even before he gave up his connection with the daily press he had ceased to be a frequenter of newspaper circles. It was not only the intrusions of newspaper reporters into his private life, however, that brought home to him the penalties of notoriety. He had one experience, at least, that was as extraordinary as it was annoying. Among the many fictions regarding his early life that began to appear in certain newspapers in Great Britain and the United

States was one to the effect that he was an orphan of very humble parentage, whose only living relative was an aunt, whom with great heartlessness he had deserted and left to an old age of bitter poverty. It was vexing enough that such a fiction as this should have found admission to the columns of even the most reckless of newspapers. Matters became worse, however, when Black found that there really was a woman who claimed him as her long-lost nephew, and who insisted that he had basely deserted her! This curious person, who it may charitably be assumed was suffering from senile dementia, began to pursue him with letters addressed to him as "Neil McVean, *alias* William Black." Her contention was that he was a nephew of hers, who had been born in 1848, when Black was seven years of age, and who, having gone to sea, had disappeared from his aunt's sight, apparently forever. So far as can be ascertained from a study of the rambling and incoherent epistles which this person from time to time inflicted upon Black, it was some fancied similarity between some situation in *A Daughter of Heth* and certain adventures in which her nephew had been involved that led her to claim the unfortunate author as the lost nephew himself. Black's temperament did not enable him to bear this annoyance calmly. His sensitiveness made him feel the falsehoods that were hurled against him, whether in malice or thoughtlessness, very keenly, and this wretched old woman in Glasgow, who, without a shadow of reason, haunted the *Herald* office in order to proclaim the wrongs she

had suffered from an ungrateful nephew, and eagerly poured her tale of woe into every willing ear, caused him not a little pain. He even went so far as to send a Glasgow friend, accompanied by a solicitor, to the old woman's house in order that they might convince her of the absurdity of her strange tale. It was of no use, however. The only consequence of this step was that Barbara McVean addressed another letter to Black in which, referring to the visit that his representatives had paid to her, she piously remarked: "I think the Lord was kind when He did not strake them, speaking lies in hypocrisy, saying you were born in Glasgow." It was all very absurd. Probably a man less finely strung than Black, and with less of the peculiar temperament of genius, would have seen nothing but the absurd side of the affair. But a man who could have done this would not have been the William Black whose keen sensitiveness made him so susceptible to all external influences. Happily, in course of time this particular annoyance ceased, and Black was freed from the undesired affections and angry reproaches of this very remarkable old lady.

The sweets, as well as the bitters, of fame fell to his lot, however. No sooner had *A Daughter of Heth* caught the ear of the public than its author began to receive, almost by each day's post, letters from strangers which showed how deeply he had moved them. The mere autograph hunters need not be reckoned; but many of these unknown correspondents of Black's clearly wrote under the influence of strong emotion. Their letters showed

that he had touched their hearts. All through his life, after the story of Coquette had been told, both men and women wrote to him constantly, as one writes to a trusted friend and teacher. Some of these letters I shall print in due course in this narrative. Here I may interpolate some personal reminiscences from the pen of Mrs. Kroeker, which contain one of the many communications he received from friends and admirers after the publication of *A Daughter of Heth:*

My husband and I first met Mr. William Black in the summer of 1870, at the hospitable house of Mr. and Mrs. Justin McCarthy. Every Saturday evening there was a large and interesting gathering of literary men and women, artists and journalists, in the fine old house in Gower Street, where our friends were then living. The Franco-German War had broken out, and excitement was running very high. Our genial host introduced Mr. Black, having first informed me that he was a rising young novelist, whose *In Silk Attire* and *Kilmeny* I should do well to read. I soon followed this advice, thereby laying the foundation of a genuine and increasing admiration for the works of the gifted writer who has passed from us all too soon. In the autumn of the same year we invited Mr. Black to our house, to which he readily responded, often bringing with him his intimate friend, Mr. William Barry. Mr. Black was always genial, bright, witty, and of that peculiar humor of his own which his friends knew so well as a distinguishing trait. His sympathies were at that time German, and of course that was a bond between us, as no less his love and admiration of German folk-song, which was very remarkable. Often I would have to sing him some simple *Volkslied,* repeating it at his request,

and particularly fond was he of Silcher's grand setting of "The King of Thule," which my husband often sang to him. This love of folk-songs was very characteristic of the novelist, who subtly evolved the national spirit, as it were, from the songs of the people. After his engagement to Miss Simpson, who sang old English songs most sweetly and with rare expression, I heard for the first time the old English ballads of "Barbara Allen," "The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington," and "By Woodstock Town," all familiar to me from Goldsmith and Percy's *Reliques*, but never sung to me before. Mr. Black would stand beside the piano, or perhaps a little back away from the singer, listening gravely, and when the song was over he begged for another and another, until, laughing, Miss Simpson would shut up the book. Later on again, the Celtic and Highland songs interested him, and he was always anxious to hear them sung and played. I remember once, when we were staying at Brighton with Mr. and Mrs. Black, years later, that he asked me to play some very old Celtic melodies which he had just acquired, and how sorry I was to be unable to make anything of them, rhythm and tune being so utterly unlike anything I had ever heard before. I told him that it would require a Highland singer to do justice to these songs. For classical music he did not care at all, I fancy; and once, I recollect, when he and Mr. and Miss Simpson met me at the Crystal Palace, where the Saturday concert contained Beethoven's big Symphony in A, Mr. Black left us at the commencement, wishing us joy with his whimsical gravity, and saying it behooved him to smoke a cigar, whereupon he disappeared, only coming in as the last chords were played.

William Black had a great admiration for my father as a poet, and when my parents were staying with me in the summer of 1873 Mr. Black, who was then living at Airlie House, in Denmark Hill, invited us to dine with

him. His old mother finely did the honors of the table, assisted by his sister, Mrs. " Titania " Morten, who had driven over from Banstead. Miss Simpson and her father were of the party, as well as Mr. Barry. We had one of the usual genial Denmark Hill evenings, which has always remained vividly in my memory. Some years later we were staying the night at Banstead with our friends Mr. and Mrs. Morten, Mr. and Mrs. Black being of the house-party as well. As it happened, I had to leave the next morning and go straight up to London to catch a train for the North. Mr. Black had to go up to London by the same train, and he kindly took care of me. Having provided me with papers, we settled down to read, when, suddenly looking up, I saw the embankments through which we were running fairly ablaze with the coltsfoot—thousands upon thousands of flaming little suns! It was a brilliantly sunny day in early spring, and the sight was so inexpressibly beautiful that I uttered a little cry of delight. In a moment Mr. Black had thrown down his paper and was eagerly looking out, too, and then he began talking of wild flowers here and in Scotland, telling me, among other things, that the coltsfoot was used in Scotland for brewing, and altogether launching forth into a perfectly delightful botanical discourse. I was aware that botany had been a favorite subject of his, and one in which he had excelled; for, on the occasion of our first visit to Airlie House, his old mother had proudly shown me " William's " diploma for botany, obtained when he was a student in Glasgow. But never had Mr. Black so much as alluded to this special study before in my presence, or even let it be inferred that he was in the least degree interested in it. I think that all who knew the man well will recognize this very characteristic trait. In the course of our conversation on flowers on this occasion, I still remember his saying that never had he seen primroses of such size

and beauty as those he had met with in the lanes of Cornwall.

As is well known, Mr. Black's power of repartee was very considerable and amusing. Of several instances I remember, one may find a place here. He had just brought out his *Daughter of Heth* anonymously and with great success. I had been reading it, together with a dear friend, and we both shed copious tears over the beautiful story. The idea then occurred to me to send the following lines to "W. B.," which my friend, who was a very pretty draughtswoman, illustrated with a row of little bottles, neatly labelled with the respective names of his novels, *A Daughter of Heth*, of course, occupying the place of honor. I sent off this genuine little tribute of my homage, and, as the 14th of February was at hand, entitled it:

VALENTINE TO W. B.

In these bottles you behold
Essence rarer far than gold,
Better than famed elixirs,
Women's heartfelt, genuine tears!
Take them not amiss I pray,
On this mad and merry day!
They are tear-drops bright and true
Shed o'er pages writ by you.
Even now my lashes wet
Pay tribute to the sweet Coquette;
And a friend I went to see
I found weeping bitterly.
Query, with abated breath—
Answer, "Oh, that *Daughter of Heth*":
While another shower bright
Volume three was spoiling quite.
So I culled this bright salt dew
From the truest of the true;

Had them bottled with a few
Of some other people's, too.
Here they are! Let them thank you!

Within a few hours I received William Black's characteristic answer. It consisted simply of Tennyson's song, "TEARS, IDLE TEARS, I KNOW NOT WHAT THEY MEAN," the title being doubly underlined.

A Princess of Thule followed *The Strange Adventures of a Phaeton* in *Macmillan's Magazine*. The former book, when it appeared in its two-volume form, was received by the critics in a way that proved that the reputation won by Black from *A Daughter of Heth* was not a fleeting one. Though some regretted that he had not adhered to the line of regular romance, and that he had given an unconventional and unusual form to his story, everybody acknowledged the freshness and charm of his style, the beauty of his descriptive passages, and the amazing power and grace of his portraiture of Bell and Queen Tita. In short, the *Phaeton* raised still higher a reputation which *A Daughter of Heth* had already placed upon a pinnacle of fame. But even his friends and admirers were unprepared for Black's next step forward. No sooner did the first instalment of *A Princess of Thule* appear in the magazine than a chorus of praise and appreciation went up alike from critics and public. No doubt, in part the instantaneous success of the story was due to the fact that the author had seized upon virgin soil. The Scotland known to literature before that day was the Scotland of Burns and Scott,

of Galt and Aytoun. Scott had ventured once or twice into the Highlands, and had painted with the splendid vigor of his master-hand a few patches of Highland scenery; but for the most part he had preferred the haunts of men; and the wonderful Hebridean isles, the cloud-capped heights of Ben Nevis and Ben Macdhui, the volcanic peaks of the Cuchullins, and the glowing colors of sea, sky, and heather on the western coast, had remained untouched by any writer of distinction. Black, with his artist's eye and poet's soul, and with the Celtic fervor that made him kin to the people of this unknown Thule, felt that here was a land of romance waiting to reveal its treasures to the world. He could never have made those treasures known to his readers if he had not first possessed them for himself. His visit to the island of Lewis was in itself a revelation to him. Thousands had been there before him, but if any had discerned the glamour and the witchery of those wonderful northern seas and rocks, they had not possessed the art of telling others that which they had discovered for themselves. With Black the case was different. The spell of the North fell upon his soul, never to be removed. In the dull days of his boyhood in the Trongate he had dreamed dreams of beauty; but Arran or Loch Lomond were the farthest points to which he had penetrated in the search for the reality. Now he found among these western seas and islands the full realization of the visions of his youth. The impression made upon him by his first acquaintance with that wonderful district of which, in the realm

of letters, he is now the king, was so deep that I cannot attempt to convey it to my readers. It was doubtless the Celtic blood in his veins, the temperament inherited from a long line of Highland ancestors, that made him so keenly susceptible, not merely to the outward beauty, but to the inner spirit of the new land into which he had ventured. The beauty filled his soul with joy and the spirit became a part of himself. Little wonder that when he first essayed to bring these things home to the reading world of London, he produced upon intelligent minds an impression almost as deep as that which the Highlands themselves had made upon himself. Many can still remember the sudden awakening of their minds to new impressions and a new sense of beauty which followed the perusal of the earlier chapters of *A Princess of Thule.* It was as though the wand of a magician had touched the clouds of mist which had so long brooded heavily above that northwestern corner of our land, causing them to roll aside and to reveal the enchanted isles which lay beyond them. No writer of his day but Black could have painted that land with the glowing colors and brilliancy of touch which he had at his command. But even Black, with all his skill, could never have made those scenes in the western islands become glowing and living realities to thousands of readers scattered throughout the world if he had not himself been possessed by a feeling of intense love, almost amounting to one of worship, for the land of which he wrote. It was with an absorbing, breathless interest that the readers of *Macmillan's Magazine*

in 1873 drank in his wonderful descriptions of this new territory—old as the hills itself, but new to the pages of our literature. By universal consent, the triumphs of his two previous books were eclipsed by this supreme success, and the success was the more readily and fully recognized because all could see that it was due to no skilful trick of literary craftsmanship, but to the love and enthusiasm which possessed the soul of the writer, and inspired and animated his pen.

And then, to this striking and almost unparalleled triumph in descriptive writing, Black's friends quickly found that there was added another triumph hardly less startling. In Coquette and Bell he had painted for us two portraits that it seemed difficult, if not impossible, to surpass. In their grace, their freshness, their fulness of life, their delicacy of shade and mood, they stood on the highest plane of English fiction. But now to these two fascinating portraits was added a third, which in its subtle charm surpassed them both, and the whole reading world succumbed as with one accord to the inimitable Sheila. *A Princess of Thule* was no mere *tour de force.* It was, rather, the masterpiece of a workman who had toiled hard at his vocation, and who had concentrated all his powers and all the technical skill that he had acquired upon the effort. But even then, I repeat, it would not have won as it did the instantaneous recognition and homage of readers all over the world if it had not been that the artist's soul was in his work, and that he put into it his own deepest emotions, and the love and en-

thusiasm which were only revealed fully and truly in those pages in which he gave us of his best. There had never really been any doubt as to Black's success as a novelist after the appearance of *A Daughter of Heth*, for that delightful book proved conclusively that he had the root of the matter in him. But it was one thing to achieve a brilliant success in literature and then to produce work not palpably inferior to it, and quite another thing to advance from such a success as *A Daughter of Heth* to the brilliant and in some ways astounding triumph of *A Princess of Thule*. Black's friends looked on with almost as much wonder as admiration at this remarkable development of his powers, while the critics with one accord admitted that the new writer was no fleeting meteor in the firmament of letters, but one who had unmistakably "come to stay."

In this year 1873 it is no exaggeration to say that there was in England no more popular writer than Black. He was the literary lion of the season. As everybody was reading *A Princess of Thule*, so everybody was talking about its author. His presence was eagerly sought for by society, and almost every door was opened to him. Some of us can recall him as he appeared at some gathering in the great world of fashion at that date—a slightly built, reserved, silent man, who watched everything through his gleaming glasses, but who spoke little, and never gave to the casual interlocutor the slightest glimpse of the genius and passion which all admitted that the author of *A Princess of Thule* must possess. It was not in companies of this de-

scription that Black ever shone. No stranger could ever judge him rightly, and one could well imagine that the impression he produced upon those who, for the moment, worshipped him as the lion of the hour, was one of disappointment. He came back from the great world to his own house and his own friends with an unfeigned sense of relief, but his silent excursions into society were not unfruitful in themselves. His wonderful faculty of observation served him as well in the palaces of Mayfair as among the islands of the Hebrides, and in his later novels his friends could discover many touches, many brilliant descriptions of social life, that originated in hours that he had spent in the flush of his fame and popularity in drawing-rooms where he had figured as the silent and seemingly self-absorbed lion of the evening.

He went to Switzerland in the autumn of 1873 for the rest which he needed after the writing of *A Princess of Thule*. He found the Swiss scenery by no means so much to his liking as that of the western Highlands. Indeed, he remained true to the end to his love for Scotland. In Switzerland the clear atmosphere seemed to him to be pitiless in its revelations of mountain summits and distant valleys. Both in color and in softness he preferred infinitely the Scotch moors and the misty islets of the Minch to the more striking grandeur of the Alps. He returned from his holiday shortly before *A Princess of Thule* appeared in the three-volume form. Its publication in that shape enabled the critics to express their appreciation of a work that had al-

ready established its fame, and his friends were enthusiastic in their congratulations.

Black dedicated *A Princess of Thule* in the following words to his wife:

It was a still and warm evening in June, and we were in a little old-fashioned inn at the foot of Box Hill, the windows open, a mild west wind blowing through the elms, the yellow sunset shining along the hills. A great silence lay over the valley; the air was fragrant with various scents; doves were calling in the distant trees. In the dusky corner of the room, where the piano stood, some one with a sweet, strange thrill in her voice was singing of "Lady Barnard," and "Woodstock Town," and "The Bailiff's Daughter." And it occurred to one of the party, sitting at the open window there, that this story, although it dealt with far other scenes, and with people not familiar to us in the south, had nevertheless for its heroine a girl who was brave and bountiful in her love, who was proud and sweet, and sensitive in all her ways, who was generous to the poor, true to her friends, and loyal to her own high notions of womanhood, and that therefore this story might well be dedicated as it is now dedicated,

LONDON, *November*, 1873. TO OUR GOOD BELLE.

In later years Black gave up entirely the use of dedications; except that of his wife, the only names thus inscribed in his books are those of his daughter Mabel and William Barry.

To Mrs. Kroeker.

PALL MALL CLUB,
WATERLOO PLACE, S. W.
December 8, 1873.

DEAR MRS. KROEKER,—Thank you very much indeed for your most generous and kindly letter. If I must at-

tribute much of the praise in it rather to your good-nature than to your judgment, I am none the less sure that it is honest; and I cannot tell you how grateful to you I am for your ever-ready and sympathetic appreciation. I wish all authors had such critics, and that I had none other! . . .

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To Wemyss Reid.

PALL MALL CLUB, LONDON.

MY DEAR REID,—Let me send you a hurried line of thanks for the very generous and friendly review of *A Princess of Thule* which you sent me. A young person to whom I hope to introduce you some day tells me that of all the reviews of *The Adventures of a Phaeton* which appeared, the one in the *Leeds Mercury* gave her most pleasure, and she is of opinion that this one is by the same friendly hand. I don't know how that may be; but any way I am very much obliged to you.

Faithfully yours,
WILLIAM BLACK.

It was about this time that I was able to render a small service to Black which smoothed his path for the future, and enabled him to devote himself more unreservedly than he had yet been able to do to his work as a writer of fiction. I offered him, on behalf of the proprietors of the *Leeds Mercury*, an engagement as a contributor to that journal. He had found the work which his position in the office of the *Daily News* imposed upon him exceedingly irksome, and the necessity of nightly attendance in Bouverie Street had become especially burdensome now that he had married and that he had many

social engagements to meet. The prospect of securing his freedom from the grinding routine of the newspaper office which was afforded by my proposal was very grateful, and though he did not retire immediately from the post of assistant editor of the *Daily News*, it was not long before he did so. But before he would accept this "order of release" from the drudgery of night-work in the precincts of Fleet Street, he sought to help his old friend William Barry. The health of the latter, who had never been strong, was failing, and he was no longer able to keep pace with the demands that his engagements made upon him. When I first proposed to Black that he should undertake the light and well-remunerated work for the *Leeds Mercury*, he jumped eagerly at the idea, which meant freedom and increased working-power for himself. But a moment later he thought of Barry, and with that complete absence of selfishness that he could show in face of even severe temptations, he pressed the claims of his friend upon me. Barry accordingly became for a season the London correspondent of the *Mercury*, assisted by Black, who undertook to supplement his work. The arrangement unhappily did not last as long as we could have wished. Barry's illness increased, and soon the bright young Irishman, who has left tender memories in the hearts of all who knew him, was stretched upon his death-bed. Then the chivalrous kindliness of Black's nature asserted itself. He was then in the fulness of his career as the most popular novelist of the day, and was able to command his own terms from the publishers, but he

voluntarily undertook to do Barry's work as correspondent of the *Leeds Mercury* on condition that the latter continued to receive his salary. It is only the man who has to earn his living by his pen who can fully appreciate the magnitude and generosity of such a service. It was faithfully carried out by Black for several months, while his friend slowly faded from us. Very touching it was during that time to visit the dying man and to see the wistful tenderness of his gaze when his eyes rested upon Black. No one in the outer world would have believed that the silent, self-centred man, whose genius men admired but whose real spirit was a mystery to them—a mystery hidden behind a mask of stolid, unbroken reserve—could inspire the love and gratitude which in those last sad days shone upon Barry's face. Black successfully concealed his own emotions from those of us who were nearest to him. He never lapsed into sentimentalism; and so far as his speech revealed his feelings it might have been supposed that Barry's illness was almost a matter of indifference to him. It was only his actions that made any revelation of the real man. More than once, when going to visit Barry at his lodgings in Brixton, I have encountered Black on his way to the same place, dressed with his usual care and neatness—a frock-coated figure more suited to Piccadilly on a summer afternoon than to the unfashionable southern suburb; and always he carried with him, regardless of appearances, some gift for the dying man—now a hare dangling in dangerous proximity to the smartly cut coat, and now a basin

of jelly or soup, which somehow or other harmonized still less with his general appearance than the hare did. The world never saw this side of Black's character, never even guessed at its existence. Still less did the men who, envious of his sudden rise to fame and fortune, sneered at him as a dandy, and charged him with being absorbed in the pursuit of his own ends, imagine that he was earning by the work of his own pen the money which kept his friend in comfort during the last sad days of his short life. This was the real Black, however—the Black who was never visible to the writers of personal sketches in the newspapers, or the casual acquaintances who saw in him only the literary lion of the season.

Akin to this story of what Black did for William Barry was his action towards another friend of his engaged in literary work in London. This was Charles Gibbon, the novelist. During the severe illness of this gentleman Black found that he was in great distress, because he was unable to proceed with a novel which he had undertaken to complete by a certain date. He questioned him as to his intentions with regard to the characters of the story and the development of the plot, and, having learned what he wanted, set to work at once and finished Gibbon's story before he put pen to paper on his own account.

Barry died, and Black was released from his self-imposed toil. But the offer which he had in the first place rejected for the sake of his friend was renewed. He became associated with the *Leeds Mercury* as one of its regular London contributors,

and, as a consequence, he was able to give up the *Daily News* and the servitude of nightly attendance at the office in Bouverie Street. He still, however, retained one post in connection with the *Daily News*. This was the position of art critic, one which he held for many years and greatly valued.

CHAPTER IV

"MADCAP VIOLET"

His Celtic Temperament — Innocent Love Affairs — Marries Again — The Reform Club — Talk at the Luncheon-table — *Three Feathers*—Airlie House—An Evening Walk—*Madcap Violet*—Black's Mysticism—Visit to United States—Newspaper Interviews—Curious After-dinner Speech—*Green Pastures and Piccadilly*—A Portrait by Pettie—*Macleod of Dare*—Winter Journey to Mull—Mr. Wilson's Reminiscences.

THERE was a side of Black's character that I have touched on but lightly so far, about which it is time to say something more definite. This was the extent to which his temperament was governed by his perfervid Celtic blood. Only those nearest and dearest to him, or his most intimate friends, were permitted to see this side of his nature. It was only they who were allowed to see him when the silence and reserve that seemed to be his most notable characteristics were suddenly thrown aside, and he flashed before his friends in all the wild exuberance of spirits which distinguishes the Celt in certain moods. Then, when he allowed his spirit to have free play, he appeared as the absolute opposite of all that he ordinarily seemed to be. Instead of silence there was speech—free, copious, and unrestrained; instead of an impassive reserve there

was an outburst of high spirits that sometimes ran to almost wild extremes. These outbreaks, so characteristic of the nature of the Highlander, generally followed long spells of anxious work. When they occurred, life became for the moment a huge practical joke; nothing seemed to be serious and nothing was treated seriously. The man that we knew disappeared, and in his place we found a boy with a boy's capacity for hilarious mirth, for practical jests, for an indulgence in the kind of merriment which we are accustomed to associate with animal spirits pure and simple. It is necessary to let the reader into this innocent secret of Black's life in order that he may not misunderstand some of the letters which I have from time to time to quote. Those written to his nearest relatives and friends were often colored by this mood, and showed him delighting in jests and humors which could only be understood by those who knew something of his temper at the moment. Without this explanation they would be wholly unintelligible to the ordinary reader. Here, for example, is a letter to his brother-in-law, written soon after his engagement:

To Mr. J. G. Morten.

"DAILY NEWS" OFFICE,
Thursday, September, 1872.

DEAR MORTEN,—I asked you to write a pretty letter to that young person; but I did not ask you to go spooning with her. "Oh," she says to-day, "I have at last met with one gentleman who understands my character, and who is capable of writing courteously to me." "He is making game of you," said I. "No," said she, "the

birds were sent to papa; but they were meant for me, and he said so. And I am going to ask him to teach me all the slang he knows, so that I may bring my conversation down to your level." What followed I don't know. There was no one in the house but a maid-servant, who has been suborned by a multitude of half-crowns to keep out of the way. But the young party is really as proud as a peacock over your letter, and is giving herself airs. I suppose you don't know that musicians have written songs to her; and poets dedicated books to her; and painters painted her in oil, pastel, and water-color; and yet I never saw her so pleased before. . . .

Faithfully yours,
WILLIAM BLACK.

I burst into poetry myself about her up in the Highlands, and to-morrow I'll send you the verses. Don't say there is a trace of *Undine* in them.

This reads like a page out of the *Phaeton*, and in this spirit it was doubtless meant to be read.

Akin to the proneness of Black to outbursts of high spirits that contrasted strangely with his customary silence was another feature of his character that was inherited from his Celtic ancestors. This was his susceptibility to feminine charm. No man could have painted women as he did who was not keenly susceptible, not merely to physical beauty, but to grace of manner and charm of character. In his early days he was constantly professing himself the victim of some fair lady. His love affairs were the most innocent in the world, and they were never more than skin deep; but he was rather fond of imposing upon his friends by trying to make them believe that each particular woman whose grace or

beauty he had recognized was the destined conqueror of his heart. It is not easy to describe this phase of his character in the clumsy vehicle of prose. One needed to see Black and to observe the light in his eye, the gleam of amusement which flitted over his face when he dwelt upon his latest passion, in order to understand him. Dull people formed wholly erroneous conclusions with regard to his feelings, and conceived him to be the victim of innumerable love affairs of the most tragical description, because of the fashion in which he purposely exaggerated the admiration that was always aroused in him by grace, beauty, or fascination in a woman. Yet, in spite of his somewhat dangerous susceptibility —a susceptibility to which we are indebted for that wonderful gallery of feminine portraits he has bequeathed to us—he never lost his head, never ventured out of his depth, or gave himself or others cause for a moment's pain; and she whom he had chosen as his wife found in him to the end of his days a faithful and chivalrous husband and lover. Perhaps the truth about the innocent and fleeting admirations and attachments of his early days will be best illustrated by an anecdote of that time for which I am indebted to his sister. He had been professing for some time to be the devoted slave of a certain Miss M——, and his sister had invited the young lady to her house one day when she was expecting him. When Black was announced, Mrs. Morten went into her drawing-room to greet him, and found him striding up and down the apartment, with bent head and gloomy countenance. "Well,

Will, what is it now?" she asked. "I am in despair," he answered. "Oh, but you need not be long in despair. I am expecting Miss M—— to arrive at any moment." "Never mention her name again in my hearing! Don't you know that I am devoted to Miss X——," mentioning another young lady whose acquaintance he had just made, and who happened to suffer from a slight impediment in her speech. "*She* is the only woman for me; and I would give worlds if I could only hear her call me once, 'Wi-William!'" It was from these purely visionary and, to a large extent, histrionic love affairs that he constructed the delightful love-making scenes that are scattered throughout his books.

In 1874 Black was married to Miss Simpson, who now survives him. The marriage took place in April. For some months Black and his wife lived in a house which he had taken in Canonbury, in order that Mrs. Black might be near her widowed father. Black's mother in the mean time remained in Airlie House, and it was here that the newly married couple entertained their friends. The Canonbury arrangement, which had been entered into solely with a view to the comfort of Mrs. Black's father, only lasted to the autumn of the year, when the house was given up, and Black and his wife took up their permanent abode at Airlie House.

It was in this year that Black became a member of the Reform Club, where he formed associations to which he became much attached. Before joining the Reform he had been a member of the Pall Mall

Club—a nondescript institution, having no special character of its own, which was established in a house at the corner of Waterloo Place and lower Regent Street. It was in this club that I first dined with Black as his guest, my fellow-guests being William Barry and Colin Hunter. The latter had at the time just achieved his first big success with a picture in the Royal Academy, and it was delightful to observe Black's enthusiasm over his friend's performance, and the confidence with which he predicted a brilliant future for him. No one who saw him with either Hunter or Barry in those days could feel surprised at the warmth of the affection he evoked from those who were really his friends.

The Reform Club was a very different institution from the Pall Mall Club. Here Black found himself associated with a set of men who were in most respects thoroughly congenial. Mr. E. D. J. Wilson writes to me as follows respecting Black's surroundings at the Reform: "In 1876 I became a member of the Reform Club, which Black had joined some two years earlier, and there I used to meet him regularly. A little group, which Mr. Bernal Osborne dubbed 'the press gang,' foregathered daily for lunch at a table in one of the windows looking out upon the gardens in front of Carlton Terrace. James Payn and William Black, J. R. Robinson, of the *Daily News*, J. C. Parkinson and myself constituted the original companionship, though afterwards some fell away and others took their places. Here there was every day a great deal of pleasant and harmless chaff, with some more serious talk,

though, as there were differences of opinion among us, politics were generally tabooed. Payn, the life and soul of the little company, dedicated one of the best of his novels—*By Proxy*—to the luncheon-table. It occurred to one member of the party to include the ladies of our respective families in a friendly gathering, and he and his wife gave a hospitable welcome at his own house to three other married couples and a father accompanied by his daughter. But *cameraderie* is not a state of feeling to be created at will, and I do not recollect that the experiment was repeated in a systematic way, though some of our womenkind became as heartily friends as any of ourselves."

Mr. Wilson has hardly expressed the full importance of an institution which for many years played a considerable part in the social life of Black. The luncheon-table was a centre to which those who had the privilege of meeting at it were drawn almost daily during a period of more than a score of years. On the first day on which I appeared at the Reform Club in the character of a new member, Black took me by the arm and formally installed me in a chair at the table, at which I felt it to be a privilege to sit. In addition to those named by Mr. Wilson, Henry James, Sala, Manville Fenn, George Russell, and many other men connected with journalism and letters met regularly, and here they spent not a few of the happiest hours of their lives. Payn's delightful humor, his ringing laugh, his never-failing flow of chaff, at once witty and tender, his loud-spoken denunciation of everything mean and contempti-

ble, gave a peculiar note of its own to the talk at the table. Black did not shine as Payn did in conversation, but he talked his best at the luncheon-table, and could cap Payn's jests with a good story, an epigram, or a quaint joke of his own that had the point and flavor that epigrams and jokes ought to have. Here, year by year, the friends met and discussed their own affairs—even the most private of them—with the frank unreserve of brothers. If they formed no mutual admiration society, and had no mawkish love of flattery, they all appreciated each other's good points, and were ready to praise freely that which they thought worthy of being praised in the performances of any of their number. Here, too, they discussed the news of the day with the freedom born of a complete indifference to the conventional beliefs in politics or ethics. It was a delightful symposium, and it had a direct influence upon the opinions of most who took part in it, forming their judgment, widening their sympathies, and expelling from their minds the last traces of provincialism in thought or feeling. There was one curious contrast between Payn and Black which was very noticeable. The former would talk freely about his work, the book or article that he was writing at the moment. He delighted to discuss his plots, and to invite the opinions of his friends upon the names he had given to his novels or the characters in them. Black, on the other hand, though he told us freely of his private affairs and the incidents of his personal life, rarely, if ever, mentioned his work. It was something too intimately associated with his

own most private thoughts to be discussed with freedom even among his friends. He was a critic who held strong views about the work of others, and at the luncheon-table he was ever ready to express those views with the force and clearness which distinguished his style in writing. Like the rest of the world, both he and Payn had prejudices of their own with regard to persons and books; but these prejudices notwithstanding, they were never ungenerous in their judgments upon contemporary writers, and even when they knew that some particular author was indifferent as a man, they did not allow their dislike for his personality to prevent their recognition of the merits of his work. All the members of the luncheon-party had one characteristic in common: they were almost painfully intolerant of bores, and it was amusing sometimes to observe the manœuvres to which Black and Payn, in particular, would resort in order to guard the table from the approach of some one whose virtues were more conspicuous than his brightness in conversation. I always had a suspicion, however, that two of Black's favorite topics, upon which at times he would dilate with enthusiasm and the fulness of detail that comes from real knowledge, were wearisome to Payn. He never allowed this feeling to be apparent to the other; but I confess that art and salmon-fishing never appeared to me to be altogether congenial topics to the author of *Lost Sir Massingberd*. Books, men and women, public affairs, the sins of publishers, and, in short, almost every topic in which a brilliant man of letters might be expected

to take an interest, moved the heart and inspired the tongue of Payn; but he drew the line at art and salmon-fishing, and Black loved to talk about both. Yet even Payn freely acknowledged that upon these subjects Black talked extremely well. I do not think that in all the years in which I was associated with him I ever heard the latter describe verbally a piece of natural scenery. One had to go to his books for the glowing transcripts from nature which he could render better than any other writer of his day. But I have often heard him describe a picture by some one of his favorite band of artists, and it was nothing less than wonderful to note the vividness and fidelity with which he made the canvas that had won his admiration live again before your eyes. I shall have more to say by-and-by of his love of salmon-fishing and the whole-hearted enthusiasm he displayed in talking about that sport. Here I need only note the fact that in our symposium at the luncheon-table he seemed to represent rather the sportsman and the artist than the professional man of letters.

Gone, alas! are the members of that symposium who gave to it its chief charm. The band who still gather round the table are thinned in numbers and bent with the weight of years; but not a few of their brightest memories are those which belong to the days when the table was at its prime, and which cling to the figures of James Payn and William Black. As Mr. Wilson has noted, one of those who were wont to join the table as occasional members was Mr. Bernal Osborne. His mordant wit was

known to all, and feared by most; but at the luncheon-table he was always harmless, and therefore never feared. His nearest approach to the personalities which he loved was in his occasional reference to Black's habit of drinking a pint of champagne at luncheon. He would point to the bottle and say, "Young man, in ten years' time you will not be doing that." I remember how, the ten years having passed, Black recalled Bernal Osborne's warnings, and dwelt with proper pride upon the fact that he had survived, while his censor had passed away.

In the later months of 1874 Black not only paid a visit to Germany—in the course of which he went over the Franco-Prussian battle-fields — but went down to Cornwall in order to study the scenery for the story of *Three Feathers*. This story may be said to have been in the nature of an experiment. It was his first attempt, after the brilliant success of his Scotch novels, to write a tale of purely English life. *Three Feathers*, which appeared serially in the *Cornhill Magazine* during 1875, was certainly not a failure; but it cannot be said to have reached the level of *A Daughter of Heth* or *A Princess of Thule*. Cornwall has a romance of its own, but it is a different romance from that of Black's native country—as different as is the Cornish scenery from that of the Hebrides. Black was anything but willing to regard himself as being what on the stage is known as a "one-part actor." He could describe the coast of Cornwall with as fine a literary skill as that which he devoted to the painting of the lochs

of Skye or the islets of the far west. But somehow or other he could not invest the new scenes with the glamour which belonged to the old. The men and women of the story were bright and taking, clearly drawn, full of life, and attractive in their sympathetic qualities, but they wanted the Highland spirit with which Black was so thoroughly at home; and, lacking this, they could not make so strong an appeal to the reader as Leezibeth or the King of Borva, to say nothing of Sheila, had done. In spite, therefore, of his unwillingness to confine his art to a single field, Black was convinced, after writing *Three Feathers*, that it was Scots life and character, and Scots scenery, that afforded the widest scope to his peculiar talents.

It was in 1875 that William Barry's long illness ended in his death.

To Wemyss Reid.

AIRLIE HOUSE,
CAMBERWELL GROVE,
Thursday.

MY DEAR REID,—All throughout this affair your kindness to Barry has been very great indeed. The other day a somewhat sentimental lady wrote to me, referring to a munificent donation of a couple of guineas, "You will have the prayers of these orphans; and just see what a prosperous year you will have." A couple of guineas! Then consider what reward *you* ought to have!

At the same time this is a business affair; and if you and the proprietors of the *Leeds Mercury* consider that so far all has been satisfactorily arranged by the proposal you make, I am not only satisfied, but abundantly grateful. As to the future—I fear that as regards Barry there is a

short future to be taken into consideration—I should be very willing to undertake the arrangement you suggest; but my time is sometimes run very hard in the afternoon, and sometimes I don't hear anything worth sending you for a day or two together. Would you alter the arrangement in this way: that anything I can send you will be taken to supply any deficiency on Barry's part, and that after *that* any possible surplus be credited to me? . . . In any case I am very deeply and personally obliged to you for the consideration you have shown to a brother-journalist who has been thrown under by the wheel of fate, and I am, Yours always,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

REFORM CLUB,
Saturday.

MY DEAR REID,—Barry has been very bad indeed—I wholly despaired of him a few weeks ago; but I am heartily glad to say that now he seems to be pulling up considerably. I can't say whether he will be able to pull *through;* but he is at least a great deal better. When you come up to London we might run out and see him; and then, as he lives not far from me, I should like to have the pleasure of introducing you to my wife. But that does not impinge on the engagement you have made to dine with me.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

P.S.—I am very glad indeed you like the *Three Feathers.* A story so very quiet in incident suffers by appearing in instalments.

Barry's unexpected rally did not last long, and soon after the above letter was written the end came. Black, as has already been told, then took Barry's

place as the chief London correspondent of the *Leeds Mercury*, and as he now received the full salary of the post, he was enabled to retire from his regular work on the *Daily News*. For some time he continued to act as correspondent of the *Mercury*, dealing chiefly with social, artistic, and literary matters; but the time came when he found it incompatible with the ever-increasing engagements that poured in upon the popular author to retain any connection with journalism. So, to his own regret, not less than to mine, the business tie which for a time united us was severed. His resignation of his post as London correspondent of the *Leeds Mercury* was finally accelerated by a malicious attack upon him in the pages of a society journal. The attack was as ridiculous as it was contemptible, but it wounded Black's sensitive nature, and made him eager to resign any connection with the newspaper press.

Airlie House became, in these first years of his happy married life, the scene of many and varied hospitalities. He liked to gather around him a few chosen friends, and at his dinner-table he delighted all by the freshness of his talk and the exuberance of his spirits. The contrast between the man in his own house, entertaining a few congenial guests, and the Black who was known to society and the world at large, was indeed striking. On several occasions I spent a day or two with him and Mrs. Black at Airlie House. His mother, who was still living with him, added to the pleasure of these visits by her homely Scots wit and her characteristic devotion to the son she admired as well as loved. One

evening, in the year 1875, I went out with Black for a long after-dinner stroll. As we sauntered along, placidly smoking our cigars beneath the shadow of the night, Black began to play the part of a showman, pointing out to me houses and roads to which he attached associations that were wholly strange to me. Thus, at the top of Camberwell Grove he pointed to a little cottage *orné*, standing in its own modest grounds, and said: "That is where James Drummond lives." "Who is he?" I asked. "A great friend of mine," he replied; "you shall know all about him some day." Then, when we came to a larger house, he remarked that a young ladies' school of a very high class was kept there, and that among the pupils was a certain Violet North, who was one of the most charming young women he knew. Step by step as we proceeded on our way he had ever some new feature to point out, and always it was associated with the fortunes of people of whom I had never heard before. At last, when our walk was over, and we again stood on the threshold of Airlie House, I could not help exclaiming: "Who are all these people, Black, that you have been telling me about; all these 'dearest friends' of yours, of whom I never heard before? Are they real or—" "They are real enough to me," he responded, "and you will get to know all about them if you read *Macmillan's Magazine* next year." Then I knew that it was as I had suspected, and that Black had so far broken down the reserve which he commonly maintained with regard to everything that touched his work as

to give me some foreshadowing of the characters whose fortunes he was even then weaving into the beautiful story of *Madcap Violet*. Well might he say that these people, the creations of his pen, were real to him. They were, as a matter of fact, more real than the creatures of flesh and blood beside him. This was one of his distinguishing characteristics as a novelist. While he was writing one of those stories of his by which for years he kept great multitudes of men and women, as it were, under a spell, he lived the better part of his life in the imaginary world that he had created. It was sometimes with difficulty that he came out of this fairy dreamland to deal with the commonplace realities of every-day existence. For months at a stretch the men and women with whom his soul was in closest contact, and who were most real to him, were these children of his own fancy. He was absorbed in them and in their fortunes, almost to the exclusion of the visible world and its inhabitants. This was the secret of some traits of his character that puzzled, if they did not jar upon, those who knew him but slightly. It accounted for his apparent indifference at times to what was passing around him, for the difficulty with which, at certain seasons, he seemed to arouse himself to the recognition of old acquaintances, for the air of deep abstraction which often distinguished him in crowded assemblies. Everything was changed when his work was done, and its burden no longer weighed upon him. Then he threw himself into the companionship of his friends with the light-hearted thoroughness of a boy living only for the

spirit and the pleasures of the moment. But while his novel was in progress, and he was weaving in his own mind the story that he was about to commit to paper, he seemed to be withdrawn into a world of his own, and to be much engrossed with the men and women whom he saw there to have eyes for the people of every-day life. I shall have more to say, before I have completed my task, of this feature in Black's character, for it was one that not only existed to the end of his life, but became more marked and obvious with the passage of the years.

Certainly, when he was writing *Madcap Violet*, he was deeply absorbed in the work—so deeply that his friends were reluctant to obtrude upon him except in those rare hours that he deliberately set aside for rest and recreation. The novel was published serially in *Macmillan's Magazine*, and there, as he had promised me, I made the acquaintance of the mysterious men and women of whom he had talked during that winter's night's ramble at Denmark Hill. Some of them were not absolutely fictitious persons. In James Drummond, for example, he had embodied some of the most striking characteristics of his own well-beloved brother James; and he told me, in reply to an inquiry that I addressed to him one day, that there was also something in the character of Drummond of our common friend, J. F. Maclennan, the distinguished author of *Primitive Marriage*. The heroine was a child of his own genius and imagination, in whose personality no one could trace the likeness of any living original. As the serial advanced towards completion in *Mac-*

millan's Magazine an uneasy apprehension took possession of the minds of many readers that it was going to "end badly." I asked him one day whether this was the case, and his curt reply was, "Do you think I would tell you or any other human being how the story is going to end?" And then he told me how Mr. Swinburne, the poet, had addressed a similar inquiry to him, and, on getting the same answer, said, "I will go down on my knees to you to spare that sweet Violet!" Letters by the score—I think I may say by the hundred—began to pour into Black's room with prayers of the same kind; and they came from readers of all classes and conditions.

For long Black kept a stony silence to everybody, while he "tholed his assize" in solitude; no happier, I am sure, than the most sensitive of his readers at the fate which he saw impending over the creatures of his fancy; and then one day, most unexpectedly, I had the following letter from him:

To Wemyss Reid.

REFORM CLUB,
Tuesday.

MY DEAR REID,—I am really very glad you like this new story, as I know I can't do any better, and your note is about the first expression of opinion I have had—excepting the, of course, highly unbiased and impartial one of my wife. I am, however, in a position of great difficulty with regard to it. My earlier notions of the course of it were all towards a happy ending; but the thing itself has been drifting towards a tragic end, and I shall run the risk of outraging all sorts of tender susceptibilities if I let it go on to that. However, we shall see. . . .

WILLIAM BLACK.

I answered, vaguely and to little purpose, I have no doubt, and this was his brief response:

To Wemyss Reid.

REFORM CLUB,
Monday.

MY DEAR REID,—Thank you very much. I think the story *must* go that way now, though I started with a different intention.

Faithfully yours,
WILLIAM BLACK.

A few days later he wrote to me again, saying that the story was finished, and that, sorely against his own will, it *had* ended in tragedy. His special purpose in writing, however, was to ask my opinion of the concluding lines of the book—a brief epilogue, in which he had at least made it clear that the men and women, or perhaps I ought to say the man and woman, in *Madcap Violet* were as dear to him as to his readers, and were, besides, intensely, almost tragically, real. This epilogue went so far that, fearing it might be misunderstood, I ventured to suggest a slight emendation. He did not resent my suggestion, and, as a matter of fact, despite the objections he raised in the following letter, he adopted it.

To Wemyss Reid.

AIRLIE HOUSE,
CAMBERWELL GROVE,
Friday.

MY DEAR REID,—Thank you very much for all the trouble you have taken about this small matter. Your emendation certainly adds strength, and my wife is strongly of opinion I should use it, my only doubt being that it

would suggest to many the last line of Browning's *Evelyn Hope*—something like, "You will waken, and see, and understand." The ideas, of course, are quite different; but you never can tell what fancies of plagiarism get into the heads of idiotic people. However, I shall have a further consideration of the matter. . . .

Yours faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

Here is the passage as it was printed at the end of the book. All but the last fifteen words is Black's own: "And now to you—you whose names are written in these blurred pages, some portion of whose lives I have tried to trace with a wandering and uncertain pen—I stretch out a hand of farewell. Yet not quite of farewell, perhaps; for amid all the shapes and phantoms of this world of mystery, where the shadows we meet can tell us neither whence they came nor whither they go, surely you have for me a no less substantial existence that may have its chances in the time to come. To me you are more real than most I know; what wonder then if I were to meet you on the threshold of the great unknown, you all shining with a new light on your face? Trembling, I stretch out my hands to you, for your silence is awful, and there is sadness in your eyes, but the day may come when you will speak, and I shall hear—and understand." If I did not know that this passage was no clever touch of art, but the real expression of the passionate mood of Black at the moment, written, as it were, in his heart's blood, I should not have ventured to quote it here.

Madcap Violet undoubtedly added sensibly to

its author's reputation. It was, of course, impossible that he should repeat the brilliant triumph of *A Daughter of Heth*. He could not a second time thrill his readers with the sight of a new world, of the existence of which at their very doors they had never dreamed; nor could he startle them by the revelation of a talent that was not only remarkable but unsuspected. But, none the less, *Madcap Violet* made a profound impression upon its readers, and to many of them seemed the most powerful piece of work that Black had yet produced. I think the critical judgment of those who hereafter may seek to compare the author's different works will ratify this belief. *Madcap Violet* is in many respects the most finished, and consequently the most satisfactory, of all its author's works. He was no longer an alien and a novice in the great world of London, and he could consequently move without faltering through the scenes of its social life with which he dealt in telling the story of Violet North. The style of the book was riper and more mellowed than in any of its predecessors, and the theme had fascinated the author even more, if it were possible, than it had fascinated the great multitude of readers who followed the fortunes of the characters with eyes that were often dimmed by tears. One can well understand that the people who had met Black in casual acquaintanceship were puzzled when they recalled its author as he appeared to them—shy, silent, reserved, intensely matter-of-fact, only moved to animation, as it seemed, by the talk of salmon-fishers, or connoisseurs of

cigars, or perhaps, if the moment were propitious, of art critics. They wondered how such a man could have written such a book. They did not understand that the writer was the real Black, and the other only the commonplace mask behind which the true man was hidden.

The story which came next in succession to *Madcap Violet* was *Green Pastures and Piccadilly*. It was by no means so successful as the Scotch stories, but it was bright and entertaining, and once again it afforded evidence of its author's powers as a descriptive writer. The most important feature, however, of *Green Pastures and Piccadilly* was the fact that Black placed some of its scenes in America, and that, in order to get the local color for the story, he visited the United States during the autumn of 1876. His travelling companions were Sir Lauder Brunton, the eminent physician, and Mr. G. L. Craik, one of the partners in the firm of Macmillan & Company. Black's popularity among readers in the United States was very great, and he was eagerly welcomed by a host of American friends. I think that greater curiosity as to the personality of the creator of Sheila and Bell prevailed on the other side of the Atlantic than upon this. At all events, Black, during his visit to the States, had to undergo a course of lionizing of the most severe description. The newspapers welcomed him with effusion, and he had to submit to the inevitable interviews. It is amusing to note the description of him in one of the New York newspapers at the time. "The gentleman whose name is known to a multi-

tude of people on this side of the Atlantic by many charming fictions, is of middle height, not over thirty years of age, with dark-brown hair, as yet apparently untinged with a single thread of gray; a well-balanced head, with the fulness above the dark hazel eyes indicating ideality; a mouth firm, yet pleasing in contour, partly hidden by a brown mustache; in dress quiet and unpresuming, as becomes a gentleman, and possessing a voice resonant and manly. In commencing a conversation with a stranger, Mr. Black showed some hesitation in speech, but this soon disappeared, and the distinguished novelist proved himself a charming conversationalist, giving play at times to the merry fancies which constitute the chief charm of some of his works. It is always instructive," adds the reporter, "to be criticised by an intelligent stranger; but when Mr. Black was asked to give his impressions of America and Americans, he replied with such rare good sense and grace that one could not help being impressed with the *bonhomie* of a man of the world, a critic who had not been soured by disappointment, and of a tourist who would not denounce the republic because he had been served with a stale egg."

To one of his interviewers Black gave a brief account of his visit to the States. After telling how he had visited Boston, Montreal, and Chicago, he went on to say that he was much more interested in the great West, and especially in his glimpse of the Indians on their reservation on the Missouri River, than in the life of the cities. They seemed to

him to be good, industrious men, and a great many of them fine specimens of humanity. In Colorado he was charmed by the scenery. "Its magnificence is almost unequalled, and it would be a fine idea for parties of emigrants to go out to some sections of that marvellous land and make a grand encampment." Asked what he thought of the cowboys and rangers of that country, he replied: "I cannot too strongly express my admiration for them. They are the most splendid specimens of mankind I have ever seen. They have bodies magnificently proportioned, bright eyes, clean limbs, no extra fat on their chests or arms, and, above all, have faces clean-cut as Grecian marbles." "Then," said his interlocutor, "they must be built like the Arabs or Egyptians?" "Precisely, and are almost as brown. They live in the open air, and of course are nearly always on horseback. They ride like centaurs. Then they are so picturesque, with their half-Mexican trappings, long, loose, flowing cloaks, fringed jackets, and fanciful adornments of the horses. I do not think they have come from the Eastern States, but from Texas, where they have been brought up almost as nomads, herders, and cattle-drivers from their infancy." It was evident, not only from what Black said to his newspaper interviewer, but from his statements to his friends afterwards, that it was these men of what was then the Far West who had attracted him most during his American visit. The love of nature and of humanity in its least artificial aspects, which had drawn him so strongly to his own Highlands, clearly drew him

from the dwellers in the towns of the United States to the simple hunters and herders of the West.

It is clear that Black had made a favorable impression upon the reporters. He was equally fortunate in other quarters, and some friendships which lasted for the rest of his life were made during this short American tour. When he came back, his complexion was so dark, owing to constant exposure to the sun, that he looked almost black. He had enjoyed himself immensely, and was full of good stories regarding the Americans he had met and the adventures that had befallen him by the way. I think the story that he liked best to tell was that of the dinner given to him by a small party of American admirers just before he left New York on the return voyage. A certain American author of venerable age, whose acquaintance with English literature was probably more extensive than exact, presided at this entertainment, and in proposing Black's health, after referring to him as "the greatest of living novelists," he called upon the company to drink to their guest, "the author of *Lorna Doone*." Black's response to the toast delighted the general company as much as it puzzled the venerable chairman, for it consisted of a warm eulogy of the distinguished novelist whose masterpiece had been mistakenly attributed to him. It was characteristic of Black's good sense and freedom from vanity that in after-years he not only delighted to tell this story in private, but repeated it—once, at least—in public. As an indication of the class of men whose acquaintance he made during his visit to America, I may

give some of the names of those present at this dinner. They included William C. Bryant, S. J. Prime, Eugene Lawrence, J. Henry Harper, Charles Nordhoff, William A. Seaver, Bayard Taylor, Parke Goodwin, John W. Harper, William H. Appleton, Watson R. Sperry, Edmund Clarence Stedman, S. S. Conant, Edward Seymour, C. Fairchild, J. L. A. Ward, and Arthur G. Sedgwick. That Black left a marked impression upon the society with which he mixed in America is proved by the vivid recollections of his visit still retained, by many who had met him, after an interval of a quarter of a century.

The best description of his journey is that which he wrote himself in the pages of *Green Pastures and Piccadilly*. If the characters of the fiction are eliminated, the story of the trip is in all respects literally true. The voyage across the Atlantic, with its trivial incidents and its one beautiful sunset, was the voyage which Black took in the company of his friends, Brunton and Craik. The descriptions of the places that he visited—New York, Saratoga, Niagara, Chicago, and Denver—are the descriptions of what he himself saw. The bedrooms, the hotel clerks, the drivers of the stage-coaches, were exactly as he paints them. Every detail was drawn from life. That wonderful eye of his noted even the most insignificant point in the scene, and when he wrote his story all these real features were reproduced in their proper places, each with its due degree of significance. There is no mention in *Green Pastures and Piccadilly* of his actual companions on his voyage across the Atlantic, but these living

fellow-travellers were assuredly not the only ones who accompanied him on his tour. The people of his book, who included such old favorites as Bell and Queen Tita and Von Rosen, journeyed with him every step of the way, and for those who knew Black it is not difficult to believe that he was quite as much absorbed in their society as in that of his actual companions. He wove his story in his mind as he went along; and fiction and reality were so closely interlaced that even he must have found it difficult to distinguish between them. The sentiment which had prompted the epilogue to *Madcap Violet* was gradually gaining in strength and taking firmer hold upon his mind. He had cultivated his imagination up to a point at which the real and the imaginary were scarcely to be distinguished from each other, and now, wherever he went, when he was engaged upon a novel, he carried with him as constant companions the creatures who had sprung from his brain. I have no doubt that during that American tour he held more conversations with Bell and Queen Tita than with any living person whom he encountered upon American soil, and it is quite certain that the conversations with those who lived only in his imagination were as real to him as any that he had with people of living flesh and blood.

This was the mystical side of his character, his inheritance from the people of the hills; but, side by side with it was the intensely practical nature which he possessed in such full abundance, and which, unfortunately, was the aspect of his character most prominent in the eyes of the world. It

was this practical element that led him to combine sheer business with his imaginative work during his visit to the States. Those were the days when there was no copyright law in the great republic, and the publisher in New York or Boston was free to avail himself without let or hinderance of the brain-work of any English author. Black, who had suffered greatly from the lack of any copyright treaty between England and the United States, ascertained that there was a possibility of securing copyright for *Green Pastures and Piccadilly*, provided a portion of the work were written by a citizen of the United States living in his own country. Accordingly, he asked his friend, Mr. Russell Young, the distinguished journalist, who afterwards became United States Minister at Pekin, to contribute part of a chapter to his book. Mr. Russell Young willingly agreed to do this, and, as the result, copyright was secured in the United States for *Green Pastures and Piccadilly*. I believe that it was subsequently decided that this method of baffling the pirates was not legal. The question, happily, has now no practical importance, for the United States has at last joined other civilized nations in recognizing the right of an author to the work of his own brain. Black triumphed, however, by this innocent stratagem, of which he was very proud. Mr. Russell Young's contribution to the story was so insignificant in extent that I think it well not to indicate it more precisely. The real interest of the incident, so far as the purpose of this biography is concerned, is the proof it furnishes that Black's poetic dream-

ing and his subordination to his vivid imagination, did not interfere with the acute and practical business faculty which he undoubtedly possessed. This was not the only instance of his attention to his pecuniary interests that occurred during the American visit. When he left the country he had, as I have said, made many friends, among whom not the least valued were the members of the great publishing house of Harper & Brothers. With them he kept up a warm friendship and close business relations for the remainder of his life.

Sir Lauder Brunton, in recalling the incidents of the trip, dwells with special emphasis not only upon Black's wonderful powers of observation, the quickness and accuracy with which he could take a mental photograph of the component parts of a cloud or the kaleidoscopic colors of a sunset or sunrise, but upon the extraordinary care that he exercised in order to obtain exact information upon any subject with which he had to deal, even if it were only incidentally, in his writings. I shall have more to say on this point when I come to speak of his method of working. Sir Lauder Brunton recalls the numerous inquiries which Black addressed to him on subjects of which the physician has special knowledge. If, in the course of a story, he had to afflict one of his characters with physical or mental illness, he always sought the most detailed and exact information regarding the particular disease of which the fictitious person was the subject, from Sir Lauder Brunton. He had a horror of carelessness and scamped work; and just as the story of

the journey of his imaginary people through the States was really, in almost all its details, the story of his own actual journey, so he never subjected one of his characters to any abnormal conditions without satisfying himself that his description of those conditions was scientifically accurate.

During his stay in the States, Black wrote to me once or twice, telling me of his whereabouts and of his experiences. The letters have, unfortunately, disappeared, nor have I been able to meet with any others written during his American journey. I remember, however, with what enthusiasm he spoke of his enjoyment of the trip, of the unfailing kindness of the new friends he made across the ocean, and of the mental stimulus that travel among a people so bright in their intelligence, and so fresh in their way of looking at life, afforded him. Of the fact that his journey did him great good physically I had ocular demonstration.

To Mr. Crerar.

REFORM CLUB,
November 6, 1876.

DEAR MR. CRERAR,—I have got "bock again," and find the old country still existing and habitable. To-morrow I propose to send you a copy of *Lady Silverdale's Sweetheart, and Other Stories,* in which you will find the legend of Moira Fergus. In return might I ask you to send me, if you can get it, a copy of a song called "Eileen Alannah," which some men were singing during our passage in the *Germanic,* and which seems to me a very beautiful melody. I was told it was by an American composer. Sarony's portraits are very much admired here; but I

fancy the profile one, of which I have not got a copy, would be best for the woodcut which the Harpers propose to have done. Perhaps Sarony would kindly send me a few of each photograph. Please give my kind regards to Mr. Sutherland. I shall not soon forget that English sole and its accompanying Johannisberger, the latter especially. We have a little fog here, but nothing to that which detained the *Germanic* three days inside Sandy Hook.

Yours faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

Black often spoke of his last dinner on American soil, and of the hospitality with which he was entertained by a host who was at pains to procure a sole from England for the delectation of his guest.

He was the living picture of robust health when he came to greet me at the club on his return, and I noticed immediately that, short as had been his stay in the New World, he had assimilated some features of the born American. He talked with a distinct twang, delighting in the nasal intonation, and he addressed me and his other friends as "Siree" or "Colonel." It was, of course, simple trifling, but it was evidence to those who knew him of his keen enjoyment of his visit. He never forgot those American experiences of his; and in the years that followed some of his dearest friends and most constant guests in his own house were citizens of the United States. Yet, in spite of this fact, the following letter shows that when the glamour of a first impression had passed away he could be critical in his estimate of the nation he had visited. *Green Pastures and Piccadilly*, I ought to say, was published

serially in the pages of the *Examiner*, then under the editorship of his friend William Minto:

To Wemyss Reid.

REFORM CLUB,
Thursday (*Feb.*, 1877).

MY DEAR REID,—It is indeed a long time since we heard from you, and the sooner you come up the better. I warned the *Examiner* of the necessary smallness of the instalments (of *Green Pastures and Piccadilly*), but then it was considered advisable to have the story last throughout the year. . . . Do you remember my writing to you from America about Dickens's criticisms of that remarkable country? Since then I have read *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and have entirely altered my mind. Don't believe what anybody tells you; there is a great deal that is marvellously accurate in *M. C.* about the America of to-day.

Yours always,
WILLIAM BLACK.

One result of the physical effect upon Black of his American tour was amusing. Mr. Pettie, the Royal Academician, who was one of the closest of his artist friends, was so much struck by the splendid color to which he had been burned by the sun, that he asked him to let him paint him in black armor as a knight of the seventeenth century. Black readily consented to stand as a model for his friend, and the result was the fine picture which was exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1877, and which, after being bought by Sir William Ingram, was presented by that gentleman to the city of Glasgow, where it now hangs upon the walls of the City Hall. Pettie, the most generous of men, had wished to present the picture

to Black, but he declined to receive so valuable a gift, and insisted that the artist should dispose of it in the ordinary way. Pettie submitted to Black's determined refusal of the valuable present, but he subsequently painted a portrait of the novelist in ordinary dress which he induced him to accept.

To Wemyss Reid.

AIRLIE HOUSE,
Thursday (1877).

MY DEAR REID,—I send you a few notes on the Academy, but I have found the thing almost impossible, as I have fully described in the special correspondence nearly all the principal pictures of the year as I happened to see them from time to time. . . . You will see I have mentioned (page 3) Pettie's "Knight of the Seventeenth Century." If you like to add that the head is a portrait of your humble servant, good and well; it is possible some of the papers may do that. . . . I want to add a word about your gloomy forecasts and sense of worry. All that is one of the surest signs of mental depression arising from excessive brain-work; and it will increase if you don't mind. A man in good mental health laughs at small worries which, when in unsound mental health, he regards as stupendous troubles. I have no doubt you have attacks of sleeplessness, too. I "have been there," as the Yankees say. You have had one warning; you ought seriously to take heed not to induce another.

Yours always,
WILLIAM BLACK.

I have given the foregoing letter because it contains the first direct allusion to any failure in Black's physical and mental health. The American journey had done him good; but undoubtedly he now

began to show for the first time in his life some signs of the strain which his work imposed upon him. There was little as yet to cause any alarm to his wife and his friends. It might possibly have been better if he had himself taken the alarm, for there can be no doubt that it was soon after this period that the first signs became visible of the nervous break-down which led in the end to his entire collapse and the shortening of his days. The story of that break-down is, however, associated with another and more important work than *Green Pastures and Piccadilly*. In the mean time it may be noted that in this spring of 1877 he had the misfortune to sprain his ankle—an accident which led to his confinement to the house for some weeks. It was his first experience of the kind, and he fretted against his evil fate. "I am beginning to get out now—in a trap," he wrote to a friend, "but this confinement to the house has brought me down to a suicidal pitch of low spirits, and I don't see what use there is in life or anything else. If I had a breath of Highland air and a glass of Highland whiskey, I might revive." It was not until the autumn that he was able to get the Highland air for which he longed so earnestly. He and Colin Hunter joined in a yachting excursion on the west coast, and visited some of the scenes that he was anxious to incorporate in the story that he was now beginning to weave in his brain—a story that was to have a marked effect upon his own health, and consequently an influence upon his whole future life—*Macleod of Dare*. During his time on the yacht he and his

old friend enjoyed themselves thoroughly, and Black entered with the enthusiasm of a boy into the sport which the islands and lochs of the west coast afforded him. His great ambition was to shoot a seal, and he spent endless hours in the attempt to accomplish this feat. He was only, I believe, a fair, not a first-rate, shot. Perhaps he had begun too late in life ever to become one. But he had, at least, the first of all a sportsman's qualifications—an indomitable pluck and perseverance. In whatever sport he was engaged he threw himself into it with a zest so keen, an enthusiasm so intense, that it was a joy to all his friends to watch him, and few there were among them who were not infected by something of his own wild spirits. And if his long hours of patient watching, stretched prone upon some adamantine rock by the margin of the sea, brought him no other reward than a glimpse of a seal far beyond the range of his gun, he never allowed his disappointment to affect his temper. He had a happier resource in his disappointments than this. If he had to find solace for his unrequited labor and indulgence in the thought that the struggle rather than the prize constitutes the best reward of the aspirant, he had also the intense joy of being able, in that inner world in which he dwelt apart from his fellows, to crown his efforts with the success that they deserved. In his novels, at all events, his heroes seldom missed fire, or failed to land their fish; and some of the most delightful sporting scenes in *Macleod of Dare* and *White Wings*, to say nothing of other stories of his, are founded

upon his own abortive efforts with gun or rod. Thus he never permitted his own bad luck as a sportsman to damp the ardor of his enthusiasm, and Colin Hunter remembers to the present day how, during that first yachting trip on the west coast, Black, his want of success notwithstanding, was the most delightful of companions, brimming over with enthusiasm, with high spirits, with an insatiable interest in every detail of the beautiful scenery around him, and in the habits of all the living creatures that came within his ken; carolling his own rhymes, fresh from his brain as he lounged upon deck or strolled on the shore, and plunging in a moment from the gay trivialities of his lighter moods into the abysmal depths of metaphysical speculation. In such hours of deliberate self-abandonment those who saw him began to understand the meaning of the Scotch word "fey."

In the winter of 1877–78 Black had reached a point in the writing of *Macleod of Dare* at which he found it necessary that he should again visit Scotland for the purpose of seeing the country in which the scene of the plot is laid under its winter garb. He was accompanied by his friend Mr. E. D. J. Wilson, to whom I am indebted for the following account of the expedition:

"It was early in January, 1878, that Black proposed to me to accompany him to the island of Mull, in which he had laid the scene of *Macleod of Dare*, then beginning to appear in one of the magazines. To keep the story true to local color, he wished to see the place in its winter dress. I happened to have

the chance of a couple of weeks' holiday, and was anxious to avail myself of it before Parliament met for a session which promised to be exciting. Black also wanted to get away from town for a while, the nervous strain of his work telling upon him rather severely when he had to deal with painful problems and pathetic situations. One day, after lunching at the Reform Club, I suggested to him that we should run over for ten or twelve days to Paris, a proposal which he emphatically negatived, never having any liking for the French capital or its works and ways. He offered, as an alternative, a visit to Brighton, or some other watering-place on the south coast, which had no attractions for me. He then said, as I thought by way of a joke, 'You had better come with me next week to the island of Mull.' The matter dropped for a moment, but later in the day he explained that he was really serious, and that he intended to make the expedition for the reason already mentioned. The singularity of the plan pleased me, and I closed with the proposal at once. A few days later, after a send-off dinner at the Midland Grand Hotel, where Mrs. Black and my wife came to bid us good-bye, we left by the sleeping-car for Glasgow. We sat up late, while Black smoked, and we talked *de omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis*. When we turned in we slept soundly, and woke early next day to find ourselves in Glasgow. We had left London dismal with the usual blend of fog and frost, but Glasgow, at half-past seven on a winter's morning, was infinitely drearier. Black, I think, was put out that I should

see his native city for the first time under such unfavorable conditions, but an excellent Scotch breakfast soon put us on good terms with the world. Before long we had left the damp and smoky atmosphere of the great city behind us, and were steaming along, alone in a comfortable compartment, towards the north and west. It was a crisp, bright, wintry day; the air was exhilarating, and the scenery had a beauty of its own which the glories of spring and autumn could not surpass. We went at a quiet rate by Stirling, Callander, Lochearn Head, and Killin Junction to Dalmally, where, at that time, the railway stopped. There we took the coach to Oban by the northern shore of Loch Awe, through the Pass of Brander—not yet re-echoing to the whistle of the steam-engine—and south of Loch Ettive to our destination. I had never seen Black so frankly abandoned to the joy of living. All the way in the railway and on the coach his trained and vigilant eye was on the watch for every detail of form and color, every aspect of beauty of that wonderful winter's day. From time to time he used to challenge me triumphantly, and ask if anything in my beloved Switzerland could match this or that picture, the delicacy or the sublimity of which I was certainly not minded to deny. After more than three-and-twenty years, I have a vivid memory of the lovely vision of Loch Lubnaig, with the rich golden-yellow of the dead bracken reflected in a crystal mirror under a sky as blue and cloudless as any that ever hung over Italy. Black's keen eyes blazed with delight, hardly capable of being

translated into speech, while he was raised to a high pitch of excitement, and almost threw himself out of the window as a black cock and four or five gray hens rose a few yards off from some mouldering and abandoned shocks of oats. When we took the coach at Dalmally, he was still more eager and impassioned in his enjoyment of the land he knew so well, especially when he found that he could impart to another something of his own feelings, and elicit a sympathetic and intelligent response. The view of Kilchurn Castle in the falling lights of evening, the majestic mass of Ben Cruachan with rose-colored clouds touching its sides and summit, the birch-trees in the Pass of Brander, lovely in their winter nakedness as in their greenery of spring and their autumn gold, seemed almost to intoxicate him. I felt then, and I have never ceased to feel, that Black, in spite of his birth among the unlovely surroundings of Glasgow and his life as a man of letters in the distant south, was essentially a Highlander in temperament, in character, in heart and soul. Long afterwards he repeated to me with deep feeling those lines so often quoted since:

From the lone sheiling on the misty island
Mountains divide us and a world of seas;
But still our hearts are true, our hearts are Highland,
And in our dreams we seek the Hebrides.

I could not tell him then—what he wanted to know—who was the author of this striking quatrain, which I believe was written by Mr. John Skelton. Black himself had a passionate love for the High-

land people, and especially for those of the western coasts and islands.

"For very good reasons, indeed, he was most popular with the people of the west coast, for whom he had done something like what Scott did for Edinburgh and Tweedside and the Trossachs, and what Wordsworth did for the lake country. At Oban, though it was mid-winter, we were welcomed with open arms. The large hotels were all closed, but the Alexandra—a comfortable hostelry which Black had made his quarters in former years—opened some rooms for us, and sent in some servants, not without the key of the cellar! We were well entertained there during the few days we spent in Oban, which was empty of many residents and of all tourists, and was chiefly filled with boatmen and fisherfolk, for every one of whom Black had a kindly word, sometimes risking an excursion into Gaelic, partly for my behoof. Though the days were short, and, accustomed to London hours, we did not get up too early, we managed to have some delightful strolls and talks. The weather, in its way, was perfect; at all events, for a little while. The soft and gracious air of the Gulf Stream lapped us in a dreamy indolence; and if the visits of sunshine were rare, they were all the more fascinating. I have recollections of gleams of sudden light on Kerrera and towards Dunolly Castle that were perfect while they lasted, and left one content when they vanished. One evening—it must have been about the 17th of January—the air was so balmy and winning that it induced us to leave our overcoats behind,

and to ramble, as the afternoon declined, along the shore, watching the sea-birds, towards which, as towards almost every other type of free nature, Black's imaginative and observing powers were irresistibly drawn. After five o'clock in the afternoon we sat and smoked on some rocks not far from the house, then empty, which belonged to Professor Blackie. It was a perfect evening, tender as an ideal English April before the rigors of May and its east winds come upon us. Black was absolutely happy, dreamy, almost silent, except when he stirred himself up to point out to me the scarts and sea piets far away on the shore, and to identify them through our field-glass. I can see at this moment the midges floating before us as we looked out on Kerrera in the middle of January.

"I suppose this wonderful spring in the lap of winter beguiled us too long at Oban, for Black, one evening, after consultation with our solitary waiter, a delightful Highlander, genial, attentive, and without any touch of presumption, announced that we must go on to Mull the next morning by 'the packet.' The steamer was only on for the winter service once a week. The 'packet,' Black explained, was an open boat in ballast, of the ordinary hooker type, which carried over the mails to Mull in the winter season when there was no steamer running. It promised to be a pleasant trip, if somewhat rough, and in the fine weather we were enjoying the only difficulty appeared to be that we might have too little wind, to Black's infinite disgust, as he feared we should have a slow and dull run across the

Channel. But our doubts were soon dissipated, for as soon as we got outside the natural breakwater of Kerrera into the open water, the sky and the breeze freshened, rising presently to about half a gale. The 'packet,' a clumsy boat, not very skilfully steered by the old man in charge, soon became exceedingly lively; and before long we were getting big waves on board every half-minute, while our wraps were soon drenched, and the condition of our valises not at all improved. Black's language became highly unparliamentary, especially when a sudden lurch of the boat and a heavy rush of water knocked him off the thwart on which he was sitting and flung him roughly down on the stone ballast. Meanwhile the boy and his grandfather carried on a noisy altercation in Gaelic — in which the word *diaoul* played a principal part—the former at last snatching the tiller from the old man, and pushing him back to the management of the sail. Whether it was that the change was for the better, or that we got shelter as we neared the coast of Mull, our rough experiences quickly ceased. We landed at a place called, I think, Grass Point, a short distance to the south of Duart Headland, where the beacon dedicated to Black's memory now blazes. The mail-bags, our luggage, and ourselves were put ashore. We bade farewell to the 'packet' and its little crew, and packed our persons and our portmanteaus into a 'conveyance' which met us, by previous arrangement, at the landing-place. It was still early, but we did not stay to ask for anything to eat or drink at the poor-looking cottages of Grass Point.

Black, who undertook all the details of our travel beyond Oban, was sure that we should get a plain but excellent luncheon at the half-way house, a solitary inn at the head of Loch Scridian, which separates the Ross of Mull, where we were making our way, from the main mass of the island. Our destination was the village of Bunessan, near the granite quarries at the extremity of the peninsula, and close to high ground, looking west to Iona and north to Staffa. Our vehicle, locally called 'a machine,' was a rough dog-cart, drawn by a rougher pony, which, I fancy, had never been between shafts before, and driven by a most good-tempered lad, the roughest of the whole turnout. We started in high spirits, for the weather seemed to be improving, and as we got up from the lower grounds to the hill-side where the track led, Black became extremely animated in his talk. Exhilarated by the mountain air, he poured out a wealth of legendary and historical lore about the island and its chief families, the Macleods and others, and pointed out with inexhaustible *verve* the curious touches of beauty in the wild landscape—so different from that of England, or even of the mainland of Argyllshire.

"The journey was rough, but pleasant. Our pony rattled us untiringly over the stony road, which he sometimes tried to leave for the open hill-side, endangering the equilibrium of 'the machine,' and extracting copious language from two travellers. When I remarked on this propensity to the driver, he replied, with a kindly grin, 'Ah, sir, he likes fine to be ganging oop the braes.' Early in the day we

had munched our sandwiches and drained our flasks with keen appetite, and reckoned that we should lunch comfortably at the inn above mentioned—about sixteen miles, as Black calculated, from our landing-place—and that we should cover the same distance to Bunessan, in another vehicle and with a fresh horse, in time for dinner. The sky grew darker, the wind keener and shriller, and the landscape drearier as we neared the bare-looking hostelry at the head of Loch Scridian. There a cruel disappointment awaited us—we were very hungry—and Black, for once, seemed to be half ashamed of his country. The host, a gaunt and dismal man, met us not at all with the aspect of one ready to welcome the coming guest. We had hoped for chops of mountain mutton, or other delights of that simple sort, but would have been quite content with plenty of eggs and bacon and bread and butter. When the landlord told us that there was not a scrap of meat or bacon, or butter, or even bread, in his house, that a 'big wedding' had been there the previous day, had eaten up everything, and drunk all the whiskey, except a little that, as he candidly remarked, was new and bad, and that all he could offer us was some boiled eggs and hard biscuits, we looked wofully at one another for an instant, and then burst out laughing. It was an unappetizing meal—for a moment it looked as if no salt would be found for us—but we were very hungry, and made the best of it. We hastened to start as soon as possible, for a change of weather was evidently at hand. Our new driver was silent, and our new horse slow, and soon after we started

a few flakes, ever growing, began to come down, and to forebode a heavy snowfall. The road along Loch Scridian can never be a very pleasant one, but on that evening the surroundings put Black's enthusiasm to silence. He did not even notice the sea-birds that screamed around us, and as for scenery, there was no possibility of looking five yards ahead. There was nothing for it but to set our teeth and to sit in silence, white figures all over, with a nasty little snowdrift lodged between one's collar and one's neck. The night fell, and we drove on and on through the darkness and the snow, impatiently computing how much of the journey we had got through. At last we turned a corner, and saw bright lights shining behind the red curtains of the comfortable little inn at Bunessan. The excellent people who kept the house had not expected us in such weather, and were just sitting down to supper—I think with the local school-master and a sub-agent of the Duke of Argyll. They gave up the room and the food to us at once; we had changed our clothes in a trice, and came down in the best of tempers to what seemed after our long day a banquet of Lucullus. We had a bottle of champagne, and as we drew our chairs up to the fireside Black became absolutely eloquent in the attempt to persuade me that there was no place in the world more delightful for winter travelling than Mull. But he could not help laughing when I murmured, 'Boiled eggs, hard biscuits, and new whiskey.' Our stay at Bunessan was, to a great extent, spoiled by bad weather, but Black, I believe, succeeded in noting

the points he required for his novel. It continued to snow from time to time, and though we walked perseveringly the sodden condition of the ground was trying. The sea was rough, with sudden squalls —though in the intervals of brightness it was astonishingly lovely—and we had to abandon our project of visits by boat to Staffa and Iona. But Black was content, and I was content with him. We got interesting views of the more distant islands from some of the low hills around. Once one of the local people—I am not sure if it was the schoolmaster—took us for a rocky and slippery scramble to a point just opposite Staffa, and brought us home over a very doubtful bit of bogland, where we 'shook up our livers,' as Black used to say, by jumping from tussock to tussock, that quivered under our feet as we landed. Our guide pleasantly remarked, when we were about half-way across, that the bog was ten feet deep, and that cattle were often drowned there.

"Everybody told us—and it turned out to be perfectly true—that we had not done with the snow. So we reluctantly brought our visit to Bunessan to a close. There was a further fall the night before we left for another long day's drive, which Black estimated at over thirty-two miles, to Salen, on the northern coast of the island, where we were to catch the weekly steamer for Oban. We had thought of going to Tobermorey and taking the boat there, but the reports of the state of the roads were doubtful, and it was uncertain whether we should not miss our connection. The morning we started for

Salen it was fine and clear, but cold; and, if my memory serves, we had a much better conveyance than on out first journey. As we were leaving I asked one of the young women at the inn to fill my flask with whiskey and water, as I knew we should have few baiting-places for many hours. Fortunately, I tasted it before I left, and found that it was undiluted spirits. I reproached the girl with not having put in two-thirds water, when she said, with a touch of pathos in her voice, 'Ah, sir, it is too reduced already.' Black was greatly pleased with this answer, and begged me always to bear it in mind as a proof of the candor and conscientiousness of the Scotch even in the trials of the inn-keeping business. Our drive to Salen was through a white world, though the roads were not as much obstructed as we had feared. We passed close under the towering sides of Ben More—a dazzling mass of crystal and silver. I think one of the illustrations to *Macleod of Dare* was intended to give a picture of this scene. The day was not particularly cold, in spite of the surrounding snow, and there were some points of peculiar beauty; but, on the whole, we agreed that a snowy landscape must be monotonous, and that it tries the eye after a while.

"There is little more to say of our journey. We were fairly comfortable at Salen, but the steamer was six hours late on the following day, and we might have been bored while we waited, as we dared not go for a walk for fear of missing the boat, had it not been for the amusing antics of some twenty Highland drovers who had been buying cattle at

Mull. They drank half-glasses of whiskey, and wrangled up to the top of their voices in Gaelic with so much apparent passion that I was afraid there would be a deadly quarrel. Black, who knew them better, assured me that all the excitement would evaporate in words, and that not a blow would be struck. They were certainly all as good friends when they got on board the steamer as if they had never quarrelled. That night we got back to the Oban Hotel, and to the commonplace, super-civilized world. I think we both were a little sorry. There was another snowfall shortly after our coach got to Dalmally, and at several points on the way to Glasgow it seemed as if we might be snowed up at some remote place on the line. But this experience was denied us. Not many hours later, we were driving back to our respective homes in London. Black and I often had talks in later days about this time, which remains among the pleasantest of my memories."

CHAPTER V

BRIGHTON LIFE

Effect of Writing on the Nervous System—The Artist's Tribute to *Macleod of Dare*—Black and the Reviewers—His Defence of Tragedy in Fiction—Letters of Remonstrance from Admirers—Leaves Camberwell Grove—Rooms in Buckingham Street—Night Talks over the Thames—*White Wings*—Goes to Brighton to Live—Paston House—The Cliff Walk to Rottingdean—The Old Pier—Mode of Work—The Sense of Humor in the Lowland Scot—Visit to Leeds—*Shandon Bells*—Dedication to Barry's Memory—President Garfield's Message to Black—Visit to Egypt—Nature-painting in the Highlands—Mr. Bradbury's Reminiscences.

READERS of *Macleod of Dare* will be able, from Mr. Wilson's spirited narrative, to picture for themselves the source of some of the most striking scenes described in that powerful and original book. It was a book which cost its author more than any other work that he had yet produced. It laid hold upon his own imagination even more powerfully than upon the imaginations of his readers. The tragedy of his hero, suffering the torments of wounded faith and pride in that wild and wintry island of Mull, was a real tragedy to Black himself; and when he came, in his prosaic home at Denmark Hill, to interweave the scenes which he and Mr. Wilson had visited together into the story of *Macleod of Dare*, his nerves suffered as though he

were writing of his own actual experiences. He was wont to say in after-days that the book had added ten years to his life. There is no doubt that the way was prepared by the stress of that tragic creation for the entrance of that obscure nervous disease which afterwards afflicted him. He was paying the penalty for that Celtic fervor which, unknown to the outer world, possessed his soul. Without it, he could never have written as he did, could never have made the story burn itself into the minds of his readers as a tale of real life. But without it, he would have been spared not a little of mental and bodily anguish. So shaken were his nerves by the writing of *Macleod of Dare* that for many months after the book was finished he could not bear to ride in a hansom cab in the streets of London, and it is certain that he never quite recovered the fine virility which was one of his distinguishing characteristics as a young man. Yet there were many pleasant circumstances connected with the writing and publication of the book that went far to recompense him for the suffering which it undoubtedly caused him. The story appeared serially in *Good Words* in the year 1878, and it was at once successful. People sought, indeed, to identify the heroine—the beautiful actress who bewitched Macleod, and in the end drove him to madness and death—with one of the most charming and famous women then upon the stage. Black was almost as indignant in his repudiation of this identification as in his denial of the claim of the daughter of the innkeeper at Garanahine to be the original

of Sheila. As a matter of fact, he had never met the lady in question at the time when he wrote *Macleod of Dare*, and his fickle heroine was a creature of his own imagination and of his study of women as a whole. One incident connected with the serial publication of the novel gave him special and life-long pleasure. He had, as I have already stated, won first the admiration and then the friendship of many of the leading artists of the day. Among all his readers none were more enthusiastic in their appreciation of his powers than these men, who of all others were best able to judge of the supreme skill of his descriptive writing and his unequalled power of making true and living pictures of the scenes he painted with his pen. It occurred to one of these gentlemen—if I mistake not it was John Pettie—that the brethren of the brush might pay a graceful compliment to the artist in words whom they esteemed so highly by jointly illustrating the story of *Macleod of Dare* in the pages of *Good Words*. This idea was carried into effect with striking success, and some of the most famous artists of the day united to give pictorial expression to the characters and scenery of the story. I do not know that the like compliment was ever paid to any other novelist. Black was greatly touched by it, as he had good reason to be. Most of the celebrated painters added to their generous tribute by presenting the original drawings for the story to Black, and they now hang upon the walls of his house at Brighton, a unique memento of the place he had secured in the affections and good-will of those

artists to whom from his earliest years he had been drawn by strong cords of sympathy. In the following dedication prefixed to *Macleod of Dare* Black acknowledged his indebtedness to his friends:

"To my good friends J. Pettie, R.A., T. Graham, G. H. Boughton, W. Q. Orchardson, R.A., Colin Hunter, J. MacWhirter, C. E. Johnson, J. A. Aitkin, and T. Faed, R.A., I have much pleasure in dedicating this story; and that not so much in the way of any compliment to them as to record my deep sense of gratitude to them for having turned aside from more important labors to give me each a drawing in illustration of the tale. If the book were better worthy of such distinguished collaboration, I should have less scruple — but equal pride—in placing their names on this page."

In the autumn Black and his family (three children had now been born to him—two daughters and one son) went to Oban, not, happily, on so serious an errand as that which had taken him to Mull in the winter, but in search of rest and recreation. They occupied Rosebank cottage—a pleasant abode, which was in due time to be described in the pages of *White Wings*. Here they entertained many friends, Pettie, Colin Hunter, and Professor Blackie being of the number.

To Mr. Crerar.

ROSEBANK, OBAN,
July 4, 1878.

DEAR MR. CRERAR,—I should have answered your letter some time ago; but we have been in all the turmoil

of removing our household from London to the Highlands. And here we are—in fine Highland weather, east winds, and driving mists of fog and rain, with our winter clothes on and a fire in the drawing-room! But you know the sudden changes: to-morrow may bring us blue seas and skies and dazzling sunlight; and then—and then—and then — we have a good-sized yacht lying in the bay, ready to carry us off to Mull and Skye and Lewis, and even, perhaps, to St. Kilda. My wife and I had a fine cruise last year round all those islands mentioned in *Macleod of Dare*. I am very glad you like the story; it cost me some work, and I have been idling ever since I finished it last March. . . . Please convey to the Burns Society my best thanks for the honor they have done me. May they have many a pleasant reunion.

Yours very faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

ROSEBANK, OBAN,
August 21, 1878.

DEAR MR. CRERAR,—I shall have great pleasure in getting you some photographs of the scenery about here, and a collection of Scotch songs, if you will kindly let me know how I can get the import duty paid. I sent a three-volume novel to a friend in America the other day, and the Customs people abstracted the middle volume! As regards the Scotch songs, I must have a look around. I believe there is a pretty complete series in two volumes edited by Morrison Kyle. A large folio one-volume edition by Fulcher I have at home is very poor. I never heard about Mavers, but I will ask.

Yours faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

We have had a fine summer, after all—beautiful yachting weather. My wife has never had those photographs done

yet. Perhaps she will address her mind to the Herculean task before she answers your note. At present she is at her wits' end with visitors.

To the same.

REFORM CLUB, LONDON,
October 23, 1878.

DEAR MR. CRERAR,—I sent to-day to Mr. Watt—who has kindly undertaken to forward them—a book of Scotch songs and volume of photographs. The former is Mavers', which I have ferreted out at last; it is not known in England. I hope it will answer your expectations; but the fact is, I have been so busy since returning from Scotland that I had not much time to compare it with other collections. The volume of photographs is the only one I could get with pictures of the Western Islands. The outline of cliff which you will see in the photograph of Iona Cathedral is the scene of *Macleod of Dare*—the precipices of Bourg and Gribun between Lochs na Keal and Scridain in Mull. Yours faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To Mr. Whyte.

ROSEBANK, OBAN,
July 4, 1878.

MY DEAR WHYTE,—You ask if I am sweltering in London. I wish to goodness I was! I am, on the contrary, shivering here, in the midst of east winds and driving mists of rain, my winter clothes on, and a fire in the drawing-room. A Scotch July! "Here am I in Arden; the more fool I; when I was at home I was in a better place." It may sound sarcastical if I ask Mrs. Whyte and you to pay us a visit; but if you should care to pierce this Arctic fog, and bring a lamp with you, you will find us somewhere

about here till the end of September. We are going yachting from time to time, and expect to run against the North Pole.

I am very glad to hear you like the character of Gertrude White; but, mind, it is not my idea. She is presented as seen through Macleod's eyes. Before you call any child of yours after her, just read again a chapter in the last number in which she sallies out to play Lady Bountiful, and goes into fits of jealousy about a placard; there she is supposed to speak for herself. But what I really want in the way of glory is for somebody to name a pill after one of my heroines. There is a Sheila steamer on the Clyde and a Sheila cottage on Long Island; a Sheila racehorse was at Sandown Park the other day, and I hear of several Sheila babies. But where is the Sheila pill? A pill has a far greater fame than any of these things. I spend each morning in reading the columns of advertisements devoted to patent medicines; but my eyes are old; the white mists are before them; I hear the sound of streams.

Yours always,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To Mr. Kroeker.

ROSEBANK, OBAN, N. B.,
July 4, 1878.

MY DEAR KROEKER,—Would you excuse my troubling you about a very trifling matter? When I was at Metz I saw a tombstone over a Prussian officer which had —to the best of my recollection—this inscription: "Er ruht sanft in wieder Kämpfter Deutschen Erde." Now I find they have changed this in January *Good Words* to "wiederer Kampfter Deutscher Erde." Would you mind telling me whether these alterations are correct? I have forgotten what very little German I ever knew, and have no means at hand here of finding out. Oh, the

rain, the rain, the rain! And the brutes have had uninterrupted fine weather here from March last till now!

Yours very faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

ROSEBANK, OBAN,

July, 1878.

MY DEAR KROEKER,—Pray forgive me for troubling you once more. Am I to understand that "wiederer Kämpfter Deutscher" (not "Deutschen") "Erde" is correct? If so, please don't answer this note, and I will understand.

Very glad to hear that Mrs. Kroeker is quite well. With kind regards to you both,

Yours always,

WILLIAM BLACK.

I insert the foregoing letters to Mr. Kroeker because of the testimony they afford to the extreme care which Black took to insure accuracy in even the most trivial matters when he was writing. No one, as I have already said, was better acquainted with this side of his character than his friend Dr. Lauder Brunton, who was one of the party at Rosebank, and who subsequently figured in the novel of *White Wings*, in which Black recorded his sporting and yachting experiences during that autumn. The following letter has reference to a review of *Macleod of Dare* and to the writing of *White Wings*:

To Wemyss Reid.

DEVONSHIRE CLUB, ST. JAMES'S,

November 23, 1878.

MY DEAR REID,—A thousand thanks for the review. In obedience to the indignant remonstrances of my wife,

I broke my usual rule and read it. It is very kind of you. I was quite surprised to hear that you had returned; but still you must have had some bit of a holiday. I am preparing an elaborate account of my summer's holiday in the shape of a yachting romance, and the *Glasgow Herald* people are forming a syndicate of newspapers to have it simultaneously published. If you think it would do for the *Mercury*, you might write to the *Herald* people; but I don't know how the negotiations are going on. When are you coming up for a week? The Reform opens on December 1st, and the Committee have carried over the Devonshire cook, whose performances laid such a hold on your affections.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

The allusion to the review of *Macleod of Dare* makes mention of the fact that Black was not in the habit of reading the criticisms of his books. "Why should I do so?" he said more than once. "These gentlemen spend an hour or two in giving their opinions of a work to which I have devoted months of thought and toil. How can they tell me anything that I do not know beforehand? As a matter of fact, their criticisms are, as a rule, either obvious or foolish. I suppose that, as a business man, I ought to read what they have to say if they had any effect upon my own readers; but I have got an audience now—as large an audience as I want—and I find that it cares as little for what the reviewers say of me as I do myself." This, it must be confessed, was a somewhat narrow view of the value of literary criticism, but it was one which Black steadily maintained throughout his life, and it was only when

Mrs. Black begged him to break through his rule, and to read some article which she knew would afford him pleasure, that he ever glanced at any criticism upon his work.

Macleod of Dare had brought upon its author's head a renewal of the thunderous protests of his readers against the tragical termination of a novel. Nobody in real life loves the "bad ending," perhaps for the very reason that it is so often the end that comes. In fiction the majority of readers abhor it, as Black learned after the publication of *Madcap Violet* and *Macleod of Dare*. Here is his defence of himself, as published in the *Daily News*, in the shape of a letter from "J. Smith," novelist:

When I began the writing of novels, more years ago now than I care to count, I set out with no more definite intention than that of making my men and women as like as I could to the men and women I had seen and known. As I never had had the pleasure of the acquaintance of a murderer, a forger, or a bigamist — and as it seemed to me that murderers, forgers, and bigamists formed, after all, but a small proportion of the population of this country—I thought it would be at least safer to leave those persons out altogether. But, on the other hand, it never occurred to me that I should be expected to represent the world as consisting exclusively of sugar-plums and orange-blossom; that the business of a novelist was to be limited to the patching up of marriages; and that my dearest friends would execrate me for admitting that even good people may occasionally be the victims of apparently quite unnecessary and unrequited suffering. However, for many a day I was left to do as I pleased. I might have made a *Nibelungen* holocaust of the whole of my characters,

and the world would not have shuddered one bit. I was allowed to work my own wild will on death-beds or marriages, and nobody seemed to care. Then a change came. I suddenly discovered on what a barrel of dynamite I had been sitting, contentedly kicking my heels. The new story ended tragically. That it *must* have ended tragically I should have thought any reader would have perceived almost at the outset. However, no sooner was it published than I was appalled at what I had done. The remonstrances, written with an earnestness, with a sense of deep personal injury, there was no mistaking, that now poured in on me would have startled and shocked the least sensitive of persons. I had been looking at the whole thing as a piece of literature; my correspondents appeared to take it as a cruel and gratuitous stirring-up of painful recollections of their own domestic calamities. Was there not enough sorrow in the world? "Oh, how could you do so, Mr. Smith?" Well, at that time I was younger than I am now, and had not acquired that callousness to public opinion that comes with years and the reading of Marcus Aurelius. I wrote many letters in reply, and argued and remonstrated in turn. I appealed to the highest literature that has impressed the world; I took shelter behind the highest names; I demanded to know whether, if fiction only dealt with the Rosa-Matilda side of life, it would not be put away from serious consideration altogether. No use. "Oh, how could you do so, Mr. Smith?"

Well, then, accident rather than design took me away from the domain of tragedy for some years after that, and the public and I seemed to get on very well together. There were no more remonstrances, only mild felicitations. One distinguished physiologist has informed me that he even now takes up and rereads after dinner one or other of the novels I wrote at this time, because he is of opinion that nice, comforting literature of that sort is a real aid

to digestion; and another equally distinguished professor has confided to me that novel-reading he finds to be quite invaluable, for after dinner he lies down on the hearth-rug before the fire, his wife reads to him a pleasant, soothing novel until he goes to sleep, then he wakes in an hour or so ready for a long night's work. I am proud to have helped this good work, in however small a measure. "But Scripture saith an ending to all fine things must be"; and so, after this period of repose and relaxation, I began to write the life and adventures of a certain set of characters whose story plainly pointed to a tragic end. That is to say, it so pointed to me, and to a few people who saw what was coming, and who wrote and implored that the doom might be removed; but the wider public were only surprised and indignant and resentful. And now there was a new note audible in the cry. This tragic end was so "unnecessary"! "Oh, why, Mr. Smith, could you not have allowed So-and-so and So-and-so to spend the remainder of their lives together? Surely it was unnecessary that such an awful fate should befall them?" These letters were even more urgent, pathetic, indignant than before; but they did not trouble me so much now. Years and Marcus Aurelius had taught me to be of a placable disposition; I was no longer anxious to point out that apparently unmerited and "unnecessary" suffering is one of the most familiar and obvious facts of life; and that any literature that aims at representing life must give it its proper prominence. The letters themselves, one might have said, were proof of the commonness of tragedy: why the almost invariable reference to some domestic calamity the writer had had to endure for himself or herself? One piece of criticism, however, I am bound to admit was sound. "I will tell you why the ending of your story is unnecessary," said a well-known physician. "I have gone carefully through the case as you present it, and from my diag-

nosis I feel confident that if I had been called in I could have cured him." There was nothing to be said in answer to that.

After this story—pray forgive me for being so long in coming to the end of the third volume, it is a matter of habit—I fell away from the tragic pitch, greatly to the improvement of my own nervous system, and to the apparent satisfaction of my friends. I will pass over the considerable interval, and come to the third occasion on which I essayed tragedy. Now the clamor arose more loudly than ever and the reproaches became more severe, because it no doubt appeared as if I had refused to listen to all the previous prayers and pleadings. I was regarded as incurable, an assassin by habit and repute. This was the climax. By this time, however, Marcus Aurelius had completed his work. I was as insensible to these piteous cries as the nether millstone; the letters were interesting only in so far as they seemed to represent the genuine philanthropic feelings of the writers. It was only by accident that a phrase in one of them set me off on a new train of inquiry. An amiable correspondent wrote to me to say that he had not only read my novels as they came out, but had advised others to read them—a most judicious and praiseworthy proceeding on his part. He went on to say, " Of late I have met with this reply, ' No, they are too miserable.' Why is this? Why should you make them all end so sorrowfully?" The little word " all " somewhat startled me. I began to reckon up. During my fourteen years of novel-writing I had written in all eleven novels; three of these had ended tragically. Was it possible, I was forced to ask myself, that out of the whole eleven novels only those three which had ended tragically had remained in the memory? I went back and bethought myself of those three tidal waves of correspondence. Was I right, after all, in my juvenile retort that tragedy was the only form of literature that firmly impressed itself on

the mind? And the more I recalled of the pleadings put forward by these remonstrants, the more it became clear that the "happy ending" novels of the series had been entirely forgotten, except when some hard-working man of science wanted to purr himself to sleep on the hearth-rug, and if all this were so, what was the obvious conclusion that had to be drawn?

At present, sir, I am somewhat bewildered by this discovery. It seems hard that my eight orange-blossom novels should be wholly forgotten, or should survive only as a soporific. It seems strange that the people who protest against tragedy should remember only the three tragic ones. And as regards my future work? Just now, for example, I am engaged in the composition of a story the characters in which have really nothing awful or tragic about them. They and I get on very well; we have had some fine excursions together; I should like to part on good terms with them. But I am driven to ask whether, in order to insure that they shall remain for at least one year in the memory of my readers, I may not, after all, have to set to work at the end of the third volume and *Nibelungen* them into nothing.

Such was Black's whimsical defence of the novel that ends badly. That he was justified in writing of the tidal waves of correspondence that followed the appearance of *A Daughter of Heth*, *Madcap Violet*, and *Macleod of Dare*, an examination of his papers proves. It may interest the reader if from a pile of such documents I select two for insertion here.

SHEFFIELD,
Jan. 22, 1876.

DEAR MR. BLACK,—Will you permit me to introduce myself to you as one of your warmest admirers, and, as

such, allow me to express my great disappointment at the conclusion of *Madcap Violet?* I am afraid it will appear extremely presumptuous in me to express any criticism of the production of talents such as yours; and yet it is possible that, as one out of the multitude of your readers, even my opinions may possess a certain weight. I ought, perhaps, to explain that I am a Quakeress, and have been brought up with a strong disapproval of indiscriminate novel-reading, and am, in consequence, very fastidious in my choice of an occasional treat of the kind. My husband is even more particular than I am; but we have both keenly enjoyed your *Princess of Thule* and *The Strange Adventures of a Phaeton,* which we have read aloud together.

The fresh charm and utter unworldliness of your books are extremely captivating to those who, like ourselves, have grown up in comparative ignorance of the heat and glare of ordinary life. Then, too, their high moral tone, and especially the purity and innocent simplicity of their heroines, render them without doubt a most powerful agent for good to our whole nation. Indeed, it is solely because of the national character of your works that I venture to find courage to address you. Had you been only an ordinary writer it would have been different, but novels such as yours must powerfully affect the moral tone of the nation, according as they make good or evil attractive to their readers; according to the impression left on the mind on closing the book, that honesty *is* the best policy, or that, after all, it is foolish to give way to noble sentiments, for they may very likely bring you to a bad end. Our human lives are made up of undefined and fleeting impressions, each of which, however, as it passes, leaves its mark behind it as a lasting legacy for good or evil to the heart; and it should certainly be the first aim of a great writer to use his influence to elevate

the tone of each of his millions of readers, and to aid the progress of good by at least inferring that *even* in this world the best people have the best of it. This has been so markedly the effect of almost all your novels hitherto that the disappointment in *Madcap Violet* was the more bitter. It is not only that you attach us warmly to Violet and James Drummond, and then—murder them, but—you make unselfishness do the deed. If you reply that it was not unselfishness, but interference, then I ask, is not that very interference represented as unselfishness? And are not all the sufferers formed out of all the kindest and noblest characters in the story, while that black-hearted egotist, George Miller, gets off scot-free?

Oh, surely, the last number of *Macmillan* was a mistake! Of all your books not one is so vivid in its personality as that one; not one—not even Sheila—holds up to admiration such utter self-forgetfulness, such heroic self-martyrdom for the sake of another, as that one; and yet not only are our two friends annihilated at a stroke, but all the sentiments that we hold to be the best possibilities of our human nature are transformed into the annihilators. Surely the present cannot be the original end that you had designed for the tale. Surely your first intention was not to leave poor Mrs. Warrener heart-broken forever under a useless remorse for having tried to do her best and kindest by her two best-loved friends. Oh, I do wish you would write another ending—or let me read the one you had originally written, so that I may be quite sure that my persistent conviction is a true one, that James Drummond and Violet are still alive and are living happily ever after. . . . Do you not think, too, that there is misery enough in the world without one of our best novelists concentrating all his energies on an attempt to increase it? What we read for recreation should leave us happier, happier and more ready to face the exigencies of life. We have

all of us friends enough to lose without mourning the loss of ideal ones. Very possibly my earnestness may appear to you comic. You must attribute it to my sober and earnest education, which renders any good fiction real to me, and the characters of it friends whom I seem to have known in real life; and of all characters in fiction none have ever seemed so real to me as yours. It is very hard, too, though this is a purely personal grievance, to have our beloved western Highlands connected with such heart-breaking associations. Our pet spot is a village nearly opposite Isle Ornsay, and, spite of all our own delightful memories of the same, I cannot now think of the magnificent view across from the mainland to Skye without a feeling of pain. In concluding, I must beg you to let my profound admiration for your talents be my apology for thus addressing you, and permit me to remain,

Your sincere friend and well-wisher,

September 30th.

WILLIAM BLACK, ESQ.:

DEAR SIR,—I have read several of your works, and been interested in all, but I am reading *Madcap Violet* with my heart in Violet's breast. I am not like your brave, beautiful heroine in any thing save one; but that one bond of sympathy has made her very real to me, and I feel as if I would do anything to help her. Why should not her story come right, when Drummond, that king among men, loves her so well? If he did not, ah, then it would be different. But why should he suffer? Is no sweetness to come into his life because he is no longer young? I know a man is led by his genius, but how I wish yours would lead you to make this best of all your heroes happy. There are so many things that seem beyond setting right in this world, but here are two between whom only an imaginary barrier exists, and, this removed, the two streams

of their lives might flow together. I felt impelled to write to you after reading the August number of *Macmillan*, but I resisted the desire then; it seemed so obtrusive. Forgive me that I have yielded now, but I simply could not help myself after reading these words, "It was not true, however, that the girl was dead. No such good fortune had befallen her."

If any one knew I was writing to you I should be laughed at, but you, who have penetrated the depths of woman's nature, will forgive a woman's impulse. The one who writes to you now wishes you all happiness, and continued success in your career, and thanks you for many pleasant hours in a somewhat darkened career, which has, nevertheless, been enriched by much that is precious and good. Once more I ask your kind pardon, and, though unknown to you, I feel that through your books you have stretched out a friendly hand to me.

Yours very truly,

———

Many novelists have received letters of this kind; but these two, which I have taken almost at random from a large collection, show not only the natural resentment of the reader at the "bad ending," but the extent to which Black had succeeded in making his characters living realities to others besides himself.

At the end of 1878 a great change took place in Black's life. He left London, and made a home for himself at Brighton, in which he was destined to remain to the end of his days. He always had a peculiar affection for Brighton, the "merry doctor" of Thackeray's fancy. Many times before he became a permanent resident I have heard him dilate

upon its special charms, and upon the greatness of the contrast that it offers to London, of which it is now little more than a suburb. Black revelled in the purity of its air, in its sunshine, and its great expanse of empty sea. With his keen eye he had detected one feature of the place—that was, the impossibility of wearing old clothes there without being found out. "Come down to Brighton, my dear fellow," he would say, "and then you'll see whether that coat which you are wearing so complacently in these London fogs is not hopelessly shabby." This tribute to the crystalline purity of the air of Brighton was as sincere as it was quaint. Black suffered from nostalgia when he was away from the sea; and as he could not afford to give up touch with London, he selected the nearest place to it where he could have sea air and could delight in watching the restless waves, and made his permanent abode there. He gave up his house in Camberwell Grove, where his old friend E. D. J. Wilson succeeded him, with not a little regret. He had been very fond of it, and rather proud of the fact that he had secured a thoroughly comfortable and presentable dwelling at a very moderate cost, because he had been content to live in the southeastern, instead of the southwestern, postal district. He used to chuckle over the fact that Airlie House, if it had only chanced to lie in southwest London, would have cost him twice as much as it did.

He could not afford to give up London altogether, for it was there that many of the interests of his life were centred. But the writing of *Macleod of Dare*

had satisfied him that London was not a place in which he could work to the best advantage. The more completely his work absorbed him, the more necessary he found it to be that he should escape from contact with his fellows. Mrs. Black recalls the days and weeks of struggle and labor in which the closing chapters of *Macleod of Dare* were written. At one point in the story he found it impossible to make any advance in his work at Camberwell Grove, and he fled, almost in despair, to his favorite Bedford Hotel at Brighton. Here he was free from the heavy atmosphere and electric hum of London; but he was also separated from his wife and the familar faces of his own household. Before he had been many hours at the Bedford Hotel he telegraphed to Mrs. Black, begging her to come to him at once with one of the children. When she arrived, he explained that he had found it as difficult to write in Brighton as in London, but that now that she had come he believed he would be all right. Then he sent her out with her daughter for a long drive, and when she returned she found him placidly intent upon his task. It was this experience that led him to break up his London establishment and go to Brighton. Often, in subsequent years, he explained to his friends that he had found Brighton to be the place in which he could work most easily and with the greatest satisfaction to himself. Yet, in the first instance, he went there as an experiment, taking a house in Belgrave Terrace for six months only. As he could not do without some sort of establishment in London, he looked out for chambers where he could

reside when in town. Almost by accident he found the place he wanted in a house which had already obtained fame in the story of English letters. This was the old house (number 15) at the bottom of Buckingham Street, in the Strand, in which Peter the Great had lived during his sojourn in England. But it was haunted by a ghost far dearer to Black than was that of Peter the Great. Charles Dickens had lived here at one time, and it was here that some scenes in *David Copperfield* were laid. The house was described by Dickens in that great story, for it was here that he placed Steerforth, one of the heroes of the book. It is to this day a quaint, rambling, old-fashioned dwelling, and it has a staircase the peculiar awkwardness of which David Copperfield described in his wonderful autobiography. The most sober of men could have tripped and fallen upon that staircase as David did after partaking of Steerforth's hospitality, and as many a friend of Black's did in later days. But when he had climbed this dangerous road to the stars, a visitor to Black in these his last London quarters found himself in the cosiest of sitting-rooms, with a view from the window which always evoked from the new-comer a cry of delight. Below were the Embankment Gardens and a wide sweep of the Embankment itself, beyond which the dark river could be traced, flowing through its many bridges from Westminster to St. Paul's. The tumbled old houses and landing-stages of the Surrey side of the Thames carried the eye of the spectator to the distant background and the gleaming towers of the Crystal Palace.

It was an ideal home for a poet or a novelist, and Black learned to love it, even as he had long loved the heather-clad heights of Mull and Kerrera. To the end of his life this house in Buckingham Street was his London home; and here his friends were wont to gather round him on his frequent visits to town, and to enjoy far on into the night his abounding hospitality and a companionship so delightful that mere hospitality shrank into insignificance beside it. No one who visited Black in his chambers above the river can have forgotten the joyous enthusiasm with which he would dwell upon the noble prospect from the windows of his room. It was at night-time, when the traffic of the great city was stilled, that this prospect was most impressive. The long range of lights by the side of the river and on the bridges furnished an illumination the beauty of which it is difficult to describe. The great mass of the dome of St. Paul's to the extreme left, and to the right the noble outline of the Palace of Westminster, seemed to frame the picture, the central feature of which was always the black, mysterious river, silently bearing its burden seaward. How often has one heard Wordsworth's immortal sonnet quoted by one or other of the little party who sat round the open window, drinking in the beauty of the scene and the fresh night-air as it blew across the sleeping city! I think that Black was never seen by his friends to greater advantage than on those nights in Buckingham Street. Certainly I never heard him talk better than in that familiar room, when the veil of reticence in which he was so

commonly shrouded was rent, and he bared his heart to his friends. Under no other conditions could one so fully realize all that he was—the poet, the thinker, the artist, the man of lofty ideals, the eager and untiring student of life, with its manifold, unspeakable mysteries, its awful tragedies, and its glorious possibilities. Listening to him then, that which at other times seemed to be an insoluble puzzle was explained, and men knew how it was that he had created and endowed with life the rare and beautiful characters of many of his novels. No jarring note was ever struck in those long talks beneath the stars and above the river; no ungenerous word fell from his lips, no mean or sordid thought. And yet his mood would change with startling suddenness, passing from grave to gay, from deep speculations on those questions upon which human hopes and happiness depend, to the lightest and brightest of the topics which attracted him, the beauties of some spot seen once far away, or the glorious uncertainties of salmon-fishing on the Oykel, or the delights of yachting in the western seas. But whatever the theme, no one who was privileged to listen to him in these moments of complete unreserve could resist the spell that was cast over him, or fail to realize the fact that he was in the presence of a master. To all who took part in those midnight gatherings in Buckingham Street the memory of them will remain among the most cherished possessions of their lives.

Black's stay in Belgrave Terrace satisfied him

that Brighton really was what he believed it to be, and he looked out for a house in which he could establish himself permanently. His choice fell upon Paston House—a commodious and substantial residence at the Kemp Town end of Brighton. He bought it, and prepared to furnish it as a home. In the mean time the novel of *White Wings,* in which he had gathered up his more recent sporting and yachting experiences in the Highlands, was appearing in the *Cornhill Magazine.* Not a little of the charm which delighted everybody in *The Strange Adventures of a Phaeton* is to be found in this tale, in which there is the pleasantest blending of fiction and fact. Nowhere do his powers as a descriptive writer shine more conspicuously. There is nothing of the tragedy of life in the book. Its author found in writing it a welcome relief from the stress and passion of *Macleod of Dare,* and the atmosphere of the two books is as different as summer from winter. For many a year there has been no story in such general favor among yachtsmen as *White Wings.* It is, indeed, the authorized and accepted guide for all who go yachting in those northern seas. The hand of genius has invested everything that it touched with a special charm; but there is no deviation from the truth, no exaggeration of realities, in order to secure effects. The most prosaic writer could not have been more scrupulously accurate in his descriptions and his recital of experiences on sea and land than was Black in a story which nevertheless reads like a fairy-tale. As usual, he introduced into the novel some characters

who were clearly drawn from life, and among these that of Dr. Sutherland was instantly recognized by most who knew the original.

To Dr. Lauder Brunton.

5 BELGRAVE TERRACE,
August 11, 1879.

MY DEAR BRUNTON,—I hope it isn't so dreadfully personal as to be recognizable by everybody. Your own friends I don't mind; I thought they would probably guess; but I hope I have put the outside public off the scent by giving Dr. Sutherland the physique of a farmer, and a terrible knowledge of Gaelic and books. I have to confess, however, with some trembling that my wife says she thought of you all the time she was reading the story. Mind, I may not turn up on Sunday if it is bad weather, or if I manage to blister my heels in the mean time. They are making weak efforts in that direction already.

Yours always,
W. BLACK.

The portrait of Dr. Sutherland in *White Wings* was one that could hurt the feelings of nobody, but the case was different with another of the characters in the same story. Rightly or wrongly the initiated insisted that this very disagreeable man was intended to represent a person well known in certain circles. Black stoutly denied that this was the case, though he was fain to admit that some rather prominent characteristics of the man in question had been introduced into the description of the fictitious personage of the book. Unluckily, by a curious and absolutely innocent coincidence, the artist who illustrated *White Wings* in the *Cornhill*

Magazine, in drawing a picture of this particular character gave him the outward appearance of the supposed original. Black himself had nothing to do with the coincidence, but it is to be feared that the gentleman who believed that he had been described in the story was not easily satisfied as to the author's innocence with regard to the picture.

To Mr. Crerar.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
August 25, 1879.

DEAR MR. CRERAR,—I don't know whether I answered your last letter or not, but I know I should long ago have sent you the domestic photographs that were promised you. Even now I can only send you an instalment, a photograph of a sketch of my little girl taken by Colin Hunter, the well-known sea-painter. It is an admirable likeness. I am glad to see that there is some revival of business in America, and hope you are profiting by it and are in good health. When is your trip to Scotland to come off? They have been having much better weather there this year than we have had in the south. My wife will send you those photographs when they are taken; in the mean time we are up to the neck in the worry of getting into our new house. We propose now to live here, keeping only rooms in London. I should be glad if you would send me an occasional copy of the *Scotsman*, just that one might have an idea of what our countrymen are doing across the Atlantic.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

The furnishing of Paston House naturally occupied much of his time during 1879, but it did not

prevent his making a spring journey to Italy in the company of Mr. and Mrs. Pettie, nor did it interfere with the usual autumn sojourn in Scotland. During the visit to Italy, Black gathered materials which he afterwards used in his novel of *Sunrise*. I take from *Harper's Magazine* for December, 1882, the following description of Paston House, soon after its occupation by Black and his family:

Black's house is in Paston Place. It was built by Cubitt, the famous contractor. A plain, substantial building, it is a handsome, compact residence. It was decorated and furnished under the personal superintendence of the novelist and his wife, and under the influence of the modern revival of the picturesque days before Nash. Pleasant combinations on walls and floors, soft rugs of Oriental hues, tiled fireplaces, and high oaken mantels, wainscoted rooms, good pictures carefully hung, bits of "old blue," and reminiscences of travel in the shape of china, glass, and bronze, and in all things an eye to comfort as well as picturesqueness is everywhere observable. The hall is decorated in a bluish-gray, the balustrades of the stairs Pompeiian red. In a recess beneath the staircase is a fine old black oak Dorset chest that came from the house of Anne of Cleves at Lewes. It is known to have belonged to the ill-treated lady herself. The dining-room is on the ground floor, the light coming in through a delicately painted window, the walls a golden green, with a dado of Indian matting. There are several interesting pictures here, notably an excellent portrait of Black by his friend John Pettie, R.A., and a couple of dainty sea-pieces by Mr. Colin Hunter. One of this last-mentioned painter's works is particularly noticeable. It is a half-finished sketch of the deck of a yacht, with a bit of sunny sail and a broad view of blue sea and sky. It is a striking study of color.

It is mainly a portrait of the vessel mentioned in *White Wings* as the *White Dove.* Her original name was the *Ringdove.* She was a government boat, furnished for service in the western Highlands. The host's face lights up with a kindling interest as I note the good points in some of his favorite pictures. He takes up my criticism with enthusiastic endorsement of George Aikman's watery effects of sea and sky, and the truthfulness of his clouds after rain. "And yonder bit of Hunter's, a reminiscence of the north end of Skye, looking something like the Irish coast as you see it on your first sight of it when returning from America," he says, "and this sea-piece by Aitken deals with the spot where the yacht went down in *Macleod of Dare.*" "You speak of it as if it were true," I remarked. "It is to me," he says, quietly. "I have heard nautical men praise your description of working the yacht." "Well, I claim to know something about a yacht. An old Scotch skipper once told me I need never starve, because I could always make a living as a pilot in the western Highlands."

Black's taste for bric-à-brac runs rather in the direction of spirit and wine bottles than in the way of teapots. He hands me bottle after bottle from his sideboard. The first is a whiskey-jar that belonged to the brother-in-law of Rob Roy. It is followed by many other quaint specimens, chiefly Scandinavian and Italian. One of them contains a rare liqueur which we taste from an ancient *droch-an-dorrach* ("drink at the door") Scotch thistle or stirrup-cup; and these are very appropriately preserved as curiosities in company with an old-fashioned tea-tray, or waiter, bearing the following inscription: "This tray was purchased at the sale of Kingsburgh House, Isle of Skye, in 1826, by the late General Campbell, of Loch Nell. After the burning of Loch Nell House it became the property of the Rev. W. McCalman, of Ardchattan, at whose death it was bought by L. G. McArthur, of Oban, who in

1881 presented it to W. Black." Throughout the tradition has been that from this tray Prince Charles Edward was served when, under the guidance of Flora Macdonald, he was sheltered by the Macdonalds of Kingsburgh on his escape from the Hebrides.

The drawing-room is on the first landing of the staircase, a cool, charming room, lighted by a large bay-window, the centre of which is filled in with a miniature conservatory of flowers. The blinds are primrose-colored silk, a deeper tone of which is repeated on the walls, which have a dado of a very fine Indian or Japanese matting, mounted in ebony. The window is draped with bronze-colored plush, having at the top and bottom wide bands of " metal blue." An ebonized mantel-piece, elaborately carved, and having cabinet-like niches and shelves for china, is in artistic harmony with fireplace and fender of brass repoussé work, the dogs or standards being the brass sea-horses from a Venetian gondola. These and some barbaric-looking but magnificently colored specimens of Moorish pottery are relics of travel in the Adriatic and in the East, as are also some fine bits of Florentine embroidery and Italian silks that are flung negligently here and there over chair or sofa. On both sides of the fireplace are inviting lounges; easy-chairs are frequent incidents on the velvety carpet; so also are cabinets and tables. Upon the latter lie a few books, the latest *Harper's*, an American newspaper, a peacock fan; and it happens that some one has been looking at a MS. copy of one of the author's novels, by which token I find his MSS. all as neatly bound as they are neatly written. They occupy one of the shelves of a small bookcase. Mr. Black's caligraphy is a firm, strong, unfaltering hand; it is the writing of a man who has made up his mind, and is eminently characteristic of his method of composition. The pictures upon the drawing-room walls are chiefly original sketches in black and white made for the *Good*

Words edition of *Macleod of Dare*. They include drawings by Orchardson, Boughton, Tom Graham, and Wyllie. When the drawing-room door is open you get a fine view of a broad canvas by Aitken—a snow-storm on a Scotch moor; and it may be noted here that this picture is hung upon what may be called the inner-hall of the house, where the overmantel is ornamented with some trophies of the chase, including the horns of a fine stag.

But it is the writing-room, or study, at the top of the house that will most interest the admirer of Mr. Black's novels. Authors have a general taste for rooms near the sky. Do they inherit it from the garret days of their predecessors? I suspect the reason is to be chiefly found in the desire to get away as much as possible from noise. . . . "I can't endure the least noise when I am writing," says Black; "suddenly becoming conscious that persons are moving about anywhere near my room, I must lay down my pen. I work steadily from October to April two or three days a week, and my wife takes care that all the upper part of the house is kept perfectly quiet; that is why I selected this room next the roof for my workshop." "Do you ever dictate any of your work to an amanuensis?" "I could not work at all with any one else in the room under any circumstances," he replied, with a gesture of his arm to emphasize his answer. The very notion of having to write with any one in the room seemed to be painful to him; and this will be the better appreciated when I repeat that there is not the smallest affectation about Black in connection with his work. He rarely refers to it, and he certainly never praises it, nor courts either praise or blame. He will talk to you about fishing and shooting and yachting with enthusiasm, the delights of the 12th of August, and the excitement attending the shooting of your first stag, as long as you like, but he will put aside any talk about his books with singular promptitude.

THE STUDY AT PASTON HOUSE

Black's study is a long room; one side of it is filled with books, the other has his desk set between two windows that overlook Paston Place, and at the same time command the Channel, freighted with distant ships. The desk is very simply furnished with writing materials. On the wall there is an Admiralty chart of the western Highlands, a caricature of the novelist from a comic paper, a couple of water-color drawings by himself ("Night in Camberwell Green" and "Morning in the Western Highlands)," and a pair of bronze medals designed by his friend Macphail for the University of Edinburgh, and in a corner stand a pair of Indian clubs. A simple room, plain even to coldness. No luxurious rug or easy-chair breaks the monotony of it, and no bit of color feeds the eye unless you look for it in nature's own pictures of sky and sea that are framed by the windows. Examine the book-shelves and you shall find the novelist's favorite authors. They are Heine, Alfred de Musset, Thackeray, and George Sand, and the particular works of the two last-mentioned authors which he has read most are *Esmond* and *Consuelo.* Marcus Aurelius must not be forgotten as one of his constant literary companions. At the same time he is a miscellaneous reader. You can see that his books of modern poetry, politics, history, and travel are not merely ornamental. A journalist for some years, as well as a novelist, Mr. Black has found it necessary to be thoroughly acquainted with the current literature of his time, as well as with those classic authors of the past whose wisdom and power are the splendid heritage of the present. It is always interesting to see the author or the painter or the scientist at work. Black's work is chiefly done out of doors; he transcribes his plots in this room, at the table—not in a fantastic garb like Wagner; not like Schiller, with a flask of Rhenish at his elbow; not like Johnson, throwing off his *Ramblers* as the printers wanted them; nor like Goldsmith, in loose

apparel; not like Jerrold, taking a turn at intervals in his garden, though Black's desk is as clean and neat and devoid of litter as were those of Jerrold and Dickens. . . . Black must have quiet, and that is all.

I have been led to transcribe so much of this picture of Paston House because of the incidental light which it throws upon Black himself, and the manner in which he struck a casual visitor. The account of the house is remarkably accurate, and would seem as true to any person admitted to it to-day as it was in Black's lifetime. There is, however, one rather curious omission in the description. It contains no mention of the billiard-room in which Black was able to enjoy his favorite game. At the Reform Club he was one of the regular frequenters of the billiard-room, always delighting in a game of pool in the afternoon. When he went to Brighton he selected a house which contained a billiard-room, and here he kept up his proficiency in the game. One of his Brighton neighbors was Mr. Herbert Spencer, and many a game did the two men—the philosopher and the novelist—enjoy together in the billiard-room at Paston House. Henceforward Black was to be one of the most familiar figures of Brighton life. The slight, well-knit figure and the bright, alert face soon became known to everybody. Brighton was well pleased to count him among its permanent residents; and he himself grew more and more to like the place, even though he spoke of it as a place of toil to be endured rather than enjoyed during the annual task of novel-writing. Always fond of walking, he spent several hours of those

days when he was not chained to his desk in long excursions over the downs towards Lewes, along the front to Worthing, or, best-loved of all, by the cliff road to Rottingdean. That place had not yet been discovered by the world of fashion, and though the great author who now makes it his home was already familiar with it, he was himself unknown. It can hardly be an exaggeration to say that Black walked from Paston House to Rottingdean several thousands of times. It was an expedition of which he never seemed to tire—as all his friends soon got to know. Nor can I remember many pleasanter walks than those which I had with him along that familiar road on the top of the cliffs, the breezy downs on one hand, the great expanse of the Channel, now shining in the summer sun and now raging furiously in a winter gale, on the other. The scenery along the route, it must be confessed, is monotonous; but I always thought that it was a relief to Black to find himself in a place where there was little scope for the descriptive writer, and no need for that kind of mental photography which enabled him to commit to memory all the features of any new or picturesque scene. The cold winds blowing from the east buffeted him and his companion fiercely as they strode onward together; and it was only at intervals that the silence between them was broken by speech; though it was my experience that, in these walks to Rottingdean, Black was more willing to talk about his own work than at any other time. The brisk movement, the strenuous fight against the gale, the glorious sense of release from the haunts

of men and the pressure of daily life, which was borne in upon one by the open expanse of sea and downs, seemed to have an exhilarating effect upon Black. "The cobwebs are all being blown out of our brains," he would shout to his companion through the roar of the gale; and then he would confide to him some difficulty which had troubled him in his work, but which now, under the influence of the walk and the rushing winds, had vanished. And at last the red roofs of the little hamlet nestling in the cleft of the downs would be sighted, and we would descend to the quaint old inn and rest there for a space before the welcome fire ere setting forth on our return to Brighton.

There was another favorite promenade of his in close proximity to Paston House. This was the old chain pier, once the glory of fashionable Brighton, but in Black's time a decaying and deserted relic of the past. The gay world in Brighton had moved westward towards Hove, and the new pier near the Bedford Hotel had become the favorite lounge. The old chain pier was practically deserted, except by pairs of lovers anxious to avoid the crowd, or at certain times by children and their nurse-maids. To Black it became, as it were, the quarter-deck of his ship, to which he could retire when he wished to commune with himself. Here, accordingly, he might be seen in all weathers, tramping monotonously to and fro by the hour at a stretch. The keepers of the pier and of the old-fashioned little shops at the entrance soon became accustomed to the sight, and learned that when Black was prom-

enading in this fashion he must on no account be disturbed. For the chain pier became his favorite resort when he was beating out in his brain the story upon which he was engaged. It was while pacing the weather-beaten structure from end to end that he composed the chapters which he subsequently committed to paper in his study in Paston House. Often the Brightonians, who knew him well, would point to him as they watched him from the heights of the Kemptown cliffs, and explain to the passing stranger that it was William Black who was walking with rapid steps up and down the deserted pier, and that he was engaged in composing one of his stories. And for once popular gossip was absolutely accurate. The first germ of each successive novel, even the first crude outline of the plot, might be formed anywhere; but from the time when he made his home at Brighton all his novels were really composed, thought out, and prepared for the final stage of writing during those restless tramps on the old chain pier.

Those early years at Brighton must have been among the brightest of his life. He was at the height of his popularity, his working powers were quite unimpaired, he was most happy in his home life and in the devoted love of wife and children, and though he had even then begun to experience the first symptoms of the nervous affection from which he afterwards suffered so acutely, he had no reason to suppose that it was more than some passing ailment by which he was affected. His circle of friends in Brighton was not a large one,

though it included more than one man and woman whose friendship he greatly prized. But Brighton is, after all, a suburb of London, and week by week there came to Paston House to enjoy its superabundant hospitality the representatives of that wider London circle which he had gathered around him. It was at Paston House, too, that he received not a few of the admirers who came to him from afar to thank him for the pleasure that he had given them by his works. Many Americans and many visitors from all parts of Great Britain found their way to Paston House as to a shrine at which they wished to pay their homage. Black, it must be said, never enjoyed this special feature of his popularity. Nothing irked or vexed him more than open praise; and whenever he could he devolved upon his wife the task of receiving the mere admirers who came to him with loud-spoken adulation. But those who had some justification for their visit—men and women introduced by old friends, or others whom he knew by reputation — were received with unfailing cordiality and kindliness, so that the drawing-room at Paston House became, and for years continued to be, the most favored spot in Brighton, the place where one was most certain of meeting any visitor to the town of special interest. There was, indeed, sunshine all about his path in those days. The description of his house which I have conveyed from the pages of *Harper's Magazine* furnishes an index not only to his taste, but to his material prosperity. The days of struggle and poverty had been very few in his case; but he had now attained

a position which placed him, so far as mere wealth was concerned, far above all but a few of his contemporaries in the writing world, and his lot would have seemed to all an enviable one if there had been any who were capable of being envious of his well-deserved success. One great attraction at Brighton, as I have said, was its nearness to London. The town was reached so easily and in so short a time by his London friends that Black was wont to declare that he saw more of them than when he lived in Camberwell Grove. The statement was perfectly true. Paston House became the recognized Sunday rendezvous of those who were on friendly terms with its owner, and the luncheon-parties on that day almost invariably included a fair proportion of well-known people—authors, artists, actors, politicians, and others whom Black had drawn into the circle of his friendships.

It was characteristic of Black that he could play and work with equal zest and enthusiasm. Those who only saw him in the free hours that he devoted to hospitality or sport could not have imagined that the man who threw himself with so much energy into the task of entertaining his friends, and who seemed to have no thought for anything but the enjoyment of the moment, was capable of the intense self-absorption that characterized him when at work. Paston House on the working-days was changed altogether from the aspect it wore on those pleasant Saturdays and Sundays when every friend was welcomed within its portals. The rooms no longer rang with the laughter of a merry and congenial

company. Silence brooded over the whole house, and everything was made to give way to the conditions that the master had found to be essential when working. He needed — and the necessity grew as time passed—absolute quiet and solitude for his work; nor could he write in unfamiliar surroundings; anything fresh or novel distracted his mind, and brought him back to that real world from which he withdrew when he was dealing with the creatures of his imagination.

I am indebted to his wife for some particulars of his mode of work. The autumn holiday with his family was usually taken for the purpose of studying the background of scenery for his coming novel, or in order to refresh his memory upon some special point. The novels were generally begun on the return to Brighton in the early autumn, and, with one or two short stories, each took about a year to write. He worked on alternate days, taking long walks of twenty miles or more over the Downs or along the coast on the non-writing-days. In these walks he used to "think out" to the smallest detail the next chapter of the story, committing it almost textually to memory. Sometimes for months he would have some portion ready in his mind to put on paper, and great was the relief when he was at last able to write it down in its proper place in the book. On one occasion he had a whole chapter ready in his mind for over two months. For his backgrounds he made very minute and definite notes in little note-books which he used to carry about for that purpose. In these note-books he de-

scribed fully every detail of light and shade, coloring and foliage, in any scene that he wished to describe, thus making word pictures of the place he wished to write about. He was very particular about accuracy, and consulted doctors for medical points, lawyers for legal, and indeed any one who could give him information on a point arising in his story about which he was uncertain. He spared himself no amount of trouble in this preliminary labor; but when once he had written out a chapter he rarely altered it even in a word. On writing-days he always worked for about six hours. After a light breakfast, which he took alone, he went straight to his study without seeing any one, and wrote from about half-past nine to one. He then took a simple luncheon, which was laid for him in an adjoining room, so that he could have it alone and without distraction of any kind; rested for about an hour, and then wrote again for about three hours. While he was at his desk, silence the most absolute was maintained in the upper regions of the house in which his work-room was situated. His wife made it her business to insure this, watching over him in this, as in so many other matters, with a devotion that could not have been surpassed. The plain little room in which he wrote commanded a view over the chimneys of Kemptown as well as a glimpse of the sea. The prospect exactly suited Black. He desired to see nothing that could distract his mind, or withdraw him from his absorption in the mental visions which he had conjured up, the scenery and the characters of his own crea-

tion. His writing-desk was placed against the wall between two windows, and above it hung the portrait of an old friend. There was nothing æsthetic in the room. It was stern and prosaic to the last degree. Its furniture was certainly not luxurious. The couch upon which he rested after luncheon on his writing-days was old and worn. Everything in the room was of a severe simplicity. As one stands in it now, too conscious of the absence of its master, it is impossible not to think of the fair scenes which have been conjured up within it; of the heroic men and lovely women who have peopled it in the silence of those writing-days; of the bright episodes of sport or adventure which have grown into life at yonder desk. It is a striking contrast to the thoughts which it evokes; this plain little room, with its dull outlook across the house-tops of Brighton on the one side, and on the other all that glowing panorama of pictures on land and sea which the hand of Black has painted to be a delight to his readers forever. Yet when one sees this work-room, and remembers the long days and months and years in which Black labored in it, one gets a fuller knowledge of the fact that he was really a dweller in two worlds than is to be obtained by any other means. When once he was seated at his desk, Brighton and the world around him disappeared, and he entered into the world that he had fashioned for himself. The silence of the house prevented any interruption of the dream that was to him so intensely real. He did not see the walls of his home, but the visions of loch and moun-

tain that he had to describe; while the men and women with whom he held converse in that silent, lonely chamber were the creatures of his own brain, the children born of his imagination, who for the moment were more dear to him, and infinitely more real, than the people of every-day life who lay beyond the door which shut him in with his fancies.

No caller was ever admitted to Paston House to see Black on those days of work. Even the children of the house knew that for that day they must remain under a restraining influence. It was only out-of-doors or in their own room, far away from that in which their father worked, that they could enjoy the freedom in which childhood delights. The faithful wife guarded the portals of the writing-room with a care as great as that with which a sentinel guards the home of his monarch, resolutely bent on preserving it from the slightest murmur of the great world outside.

In 1880 Black was busy with a story that differed in many respects from any that he had yet written, and that he himself came subsequently to regard as his best piece of work. This was *Sunrise*. The public did not ratify Black's own verdict upon the book. Everybody admitted its merit; but, as those who have read it will remember, it is a tale of intrigue and adventure, of secret societies and dark political plottings. As usual, the book was constructed with extreme care, and the backgrounds were invariably drawn from life. He introduced his own rooms in Buckingham Street into the tale, and he went to Switzerland and Italy in

the autumn of the year for the special purpose of procuring "local color" for the book. In the spring he had taken a shorter journey, from which we had hoped he would reap scenes for his pen; but an accident cut short the tour, and, so far as I know, he never used it in any of his books. This was a drive to visit the ruined abbeys of eastern Yorkshire. Sir George Wombwell, of Balaclava fame, had invited a small party to accompany him on such a drive. Black, Bret Harte, Mr. Shepard, the American Vice-Consul at Bradford, and myself, were Sir George's guests. We met at York one Saturday morning in April, and as our host was not to arrive till dinner-time we resolved to spend the afternoon in a visit to the battle-field of Marston Moor. Black was delighted with all that he saw; delighted, too, with the companionship of Bret Harte and of Shepard, and full of that eager interest in everything new which distinguished him when he was making notes with the intention of using them in his work. Unluckily, in scrambling over a hedge on the battle-field I had a fall, and twisted my knee so severely that for months afterwards I was an absolute cripple. At the moment I had no idea of the severity of my injuries, and made light of them, so that my companions naturally made light of them also. We were to dine at the Yorkshire Club that evening with Sir George Wombwell, and as Black, who had never met Sir George, and who was always shy of strangers, declared that he would not go to the dinner unless I went also, I accompanied the party to the club, though by rights I

ought to have been in bed. I remember few more lively evenings than that. Black and Bret Harte, whose acquaintance he had just made, vied with each other in the good stories they told and the repartees they exchanged, so that even the acute pain that I was suffering did not prevent my enjoyment of Black's humor in one of his brightest moods. But the next morning I was in the hands of the doctor and confined to bed. Black spent most of the day with me in my bedroom, and no one would have imagined from the merriment which filled the chamber that it contained a seriously injured man. On the following day I was conveyed to my own home, to spend the next three months in bed; but neither Black nor I had the slightest idea of the gravity of my injuries, and at my urgent request he started on the driving tour.

To Wemyss Reid.

REFORM CLUB,
May 1, 1880.

MY DEAR REID,—I should be glad of a line to know how you are. I hope you will not attempt to stir until your knee is *thoroughly* well; for if you do, you will run the risk of the thing becoming chronic. The trip to Newburgh and Rievaulx was very interesting; but with you invalided out, I thought it was much better to postpone the rest. Bret Harte went down to us at Brighton, and if we didn't amuse him he certainly amused us. He is coming down again next week. That wretch Shepard insisted on paying our hotel bills; surely that, as the languishing nobleman remarked, was not in the contract? But we may have our revenge some day.

Always yours, WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

REFORM CLUB,
June 2, 1880.

MY DEAR REID,—Let me know how you are getting on. I was horrified to hear of your going out so soon; you don't seem to know what care must be taken of injuries to the knee to prevent the accursed thing from becoming permanent or chronic. For you to talk of "going away" for ever so long yet is simple madness. Possess your soul in patience; it will be better for you in the end. And in a few weeks' time don't be surprised if Bret Harte and I come and look you up—that is, if he is not compelled for mere shame's sake to go to his consular duties (! ! !) at once. He is the most extraordinary globule of mercury—comet—aërolite gone drunk—flash of lightning doing catherine wheels—I ever had any experience of. Nobody knows where he is, and the day before yesterday I discovered here a pile of letters that had been slowly accumulating for him since February, 1879. It seems he never reported himself to the all-seeing Escott (the hall porter) and never asked for letters when he got his month's honorary membership last year. People are now sending letters to him from America addressed to me at Brighton! But he is a mystery and the cause of mystifications. I heard the other day that a society paper had printed a minute account of how I had been driving B. H. and other friends in Yorkshire in a phaeton, had upset the whole concern and half murdered nearly all the party. This is as close to nature as we can go for sixpence. I remember a paragraph in the American papers saying that I had gone to see my sister in Tennessee. Having no sister in America, and never having been near Tennessee, I could not understand what it meant, until long after Huxley told me that at about that time he had gone to see his brother in Tennessee. Such is life, and other poems. All the people

here are as usual, except Payn, who, I fear, must be laid up with rheumatics. Again I beseech you for a line.

Always yours,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,

July 31, 1880.

MY DEAR REID,—I am exceedingly glad to hear that you are out and about again. I wrote you about a month ago, and getting no answer, began to fear you were rather bad; but I hope you will take to heart the warning you got after the Gladstone meeting, and let your knee have sufficient rest to get thoroughly cured. I wanted Harte to arrange a raid on you; but that faithless cuss never turned up again after leaving me in Oban, and Norman Lockyer and I ran out our term of leave to the last minute, so that I had no chance of stopping at Leeds on the journey south. But I saw the place on coming through. Oh, holy Moses! I thought my native Glasgow was bad enough; but surely Leeds beats it for smoke. I hope you live somewhere out of the town. There were some fine houses along the crest of a hill about half an hour before our getting to Leeds. I hope to hear of your purchasing one of these soon, and settling down as the originator of a county family, far away from printers' devils. Speaking of which, Lockyer told me of Tennyson having come to South Kensington to see some marvel of the heavens, and turning away from the telescope with the remark, "After seeing that one does not think so much of the county families." We shall not be going away, I expect, till the beginning of September. Shall you be in London before then? I could run up to have a chat with you, or you might come down here for a day or two's rest. Bret Harte was to have been back from Paris last night, but he

is a wandering comet. The only place he is sure not to be found in is at the Glasgow Consulate. Let me hear how you are soon.

Yours always,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To John Whyte.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
July 31, 1880.

MY DEAR WHYTE,—I am afraid your letter must have been written sarcastical, for I also have been in the Highlands. I suddenly found myself liberated, and took the occasion of Bret Harte's going to Glasgow to lug him through with me to Oban, expecting to find Colin Hunter at Iona. That faithless cuss, however, I discovered was on the east coast, and so I was lucky enough to fall in with Norman Lockyer, the astronomer. He and I had a few days' fishing, and then I came back to get ready for our more extended autumn prowl. Confound that Oban! I never go there but I buy pictures which I can't afford. But we had the most delightful weather, and now Mrs. Millais writes me from the Craig-ard Hotel that it is pouring in torrents. Was Mrs. Whyte with you? Give her my best regards. I shall never forget that dinner-party at which I last met her. I think she saw the fun of it. Nobody but Leigh Hunt or Sidney Smith could have described the amiable simplicity and solemnity with which they regarded the most obvious joke, and if Charles Lamb had been there he would have repeated his performance of taking a candle and examining the skulls of some of the people. Adieu. Next time you come up take an extra day and run down here, and I will show you some sea-pieces that will make your mouth water.

Yours always,
WILLIAM BLACK.

One proof of the extent to which Black was imbued with the Celtic spirit was to be found in the slight degree of good-natured contempt in which he held the Lowland Scot of a certain type. His inability to see a joke was his crowning offence in the eyes of Black, whose own sense of humor was so highly developed and so keen. He had a favorite story, which I have often heard him tell, that he used as an illustration of the matter-of-fact realism that distinguishes many of his fellow-countrymen. Somebody was telling a Scotsman a marvellous tale which he had just been reading. A certain Eastern potentate, having taken offence at the doings of his grand vizier, had ordered him to be put to death. The victim knew that he must die, but wished to die as comfortably as possible. He was aware that his master's chief executioner was a proficient in the art of despatching his fellow-creatures, and could send them out of the world not only with incredible swiftness, but with no appreciable suffering. Accordingly he sent for the executioner, and offered him a very large sum of money on condition that he put him to death without pain. The official promised to do his best, and the grand vizier went to his doom in a frame of pious resignation. Kneeling down to receive the fatal blow he was conscious that the sword of the executioner was whirled about his head, but he felt nothing. Opening his eyes, he reproached the man, saying, "How is this? You undertook for a large sum of money to put me to death instantaneously and without pain, yet you are only play-

ing with me and prolonging my misery. Do thy work quickly." Thereupon the executioner stepped up to the condemned man and offered him a pinch of snuff. The vizier took the pinch of snuff and sneezed, and his head forthwith tumbled from his shoulders. This is the story which, according to Black, was told to a fellow-countryman of his. The latter, having heard it, uttered an interrogative "Well?" "Well!" repeated his interlocutor, "what do you mean?" "I am waiting for the finish of your story," said the Scot. "But you've got the finish," said the other. "Don't you see that the executioner was so clever that he cut the fellow's neck in two without letting him feel it?" "Ou aye, I ken that weel eneugh, but that's not the point. What I want to know is, did the executioner get his money?" And this, according to Black, was a typical example of the point of view of a certain class among his fellow-countrymen.

It was not only among his fellow-countrymen that he discovered the lack of that humor which gladdens the heart of the observer of life. One experience of his own, on which he was fond of dwelling, took place at the dinner of a very august body at which he was a guest. Two rich gentlemen, with "self-made" written large all over them, inquired with an air of patronage what line of business he was in. On his meekly replying that he wrote novels they expressed their surprise and pleasure at meeting a person of his class. The first gentleman said, "I like to meet littery people. I buy

books. I've got a library of six 'undred volumes, all bound in full calf. I've got all the works of Thackeray and Dickenson, and if you'll tell me the names of yours I'll buy them, too. I've never read them." The second gentleman, anxious to atone for his friend's indiscretion, kicked his shins under the table, and said, "Oh yes, you have, but *you've forgotten them.*" Clearly Black found little to distinguish between the dull man on one side of the Tweed and the other. He liked, however, the sturdy independence with which the Scot, even when he finds that he has made a mistake, maintains his self-possession. It was during one of his yachting tours on the west coast about this time that he went into a small post-office at a remote place to send off a telegram. The owner sold books, and importuned Black to buy some of his own novels. "Every one buys Black's books when they come up here." At last Black, to get rid of the man's attentions, was compelled to say, "Well, these books are of no use to me, for I wrote them myself." The man stared in evident incredulity at the person who made this bold assertion, but when Black handed in his telegram, which he had duly signed, he realized the truth, and said, patronizingly, "Well, if you *are* William Black, I must say you're a very clever fellow."

Black's Scotch-American friend, Mr. Crerar, to whom he had been indebted for many kindnesses, both during his visit to America and subsequently, and through whom he had been elected a vice-president of the New York Burns Society, was in the

habit of sending him every year a Christmas gift. In 1880, through some accident, he was unable to do this.

To Mr. Crerar.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
December 22, 1880.

MY DEAR MR. CRERAR,—I am exceedingly glad that your kind intentions have been frustrated this year; first, because we have too often impinged on your good-nature in this way; and, secondly, because we are going from home for Christmas. But we thank you most heartily all the same, and Mr. Sutherland, too. When is he coming over to buy that Scotch moor? I had a note the other day from Lord Rosebery, asking me to go to his place in Buckinghamshire. I could not go, but if I had, don't you think the two honorary vice-presidents of the New York Burns Society (is that right?) would certainly have drunk your health, seeing it is so near Christmas? My wife and I send you our best greetings of the season.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

P.S.—I *should* like to send you a few bottles of real mountain dew I have just had down from the Highlands. How could it be managed? Do you know the purser of any steamer who would convey them without "preeing" them on the way? I am not much of a judge of whiskey myself, but I know this has been four years in bond, and people who have drunk enough in their lives say it is good.

To the same.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
December 23, 1880.

MY DEAR CRERAR,—It is really very kind of you to send us those birds, and both my wife and myself are ex-

ceedingly pleased to be reminded of you (not that that was necessary) in so substantial a fashion. You will be glad to know that they have arrived in capital condition; and the turkey is so exceptionally fine a fellow that we propose to have his plumage made a sort of trophy of to fix up in our hall under some huge horns that also came from America—from Hudson's Bay territory. But you don't say anything about yourself in your note. How are you getting on in health and business? . . . I am very glad to see by the occasional *Scotsman* you send me that our countrymen don't seem to lose any of their clannishness; likewise that the Burns Society flourishes. Ought I to subscribe to their eleemosynary funds? Or perhaps it would be better this way: that if you chanced on any case of distress you might let me know and I could send you some contribution. The Scotch societies in London do a great deal of good—especially in the way of education. I see by your paper that George Macdonald has got a house at Bordighera. We came through there in October, my wife and myself having been for about three months in Italy this year. When are you coming over? Are there no books you would like to have sent you? If there are, I wish you would tell me without ceremony, and I could have them forwarded by one of your steward friends. With heartiest Christmas wishes from my wife (that wonderful photograph which she has never had done since she was married hasn't come off yet) and myself,

Yours very faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

Sunrise having been written, Black was able to enjoy another long holiday in 1881. Early in the year he went to Leeds to be my guest for a few days. I was anxious that due honor should be done to one whose literary merits were only equalled by his

modesty, and I gave a large dinner-party at which he was the principal guest. Without telling him beforehand my intention, I proposed his health, hoping that as the gathering was a private one he would not object to make a speech to the circle of admirers who surrounded him. Here is a *verbatim* report of his reply: "When I left King's Cross the other day I took a ticket for Leeds, as I meant to go to Yorkshire; but there must have been some mistake on the road, for I have been made so much at home here that I must have been carried to Scotland without knowing it." It was a good beginning, but it was the end also. Having proceeded with fluency so far, the inevitable attack of stage-fright overtook him. He glared wildly around him for half a minute, and then, without another word, dropped into his seat. But I think that what he did say was sufficient, and at all events his audience were flattered and delighted. He had a good time in Leeds, and enjoyed himself to the top of his bent, making notes unceasingly of the characteristic people he met, some of whom were afterwards destined to figure in his stories. He was, however, somewhat unduly impressed by the proverbial hospitality of Yorkshire, not realizing that it was, after all, inferior to his own.

To Wemyss Reid.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
Monday (*March*, 1881).

MY DEAR REID,— . . . I think I have fairly recovered from the eating and drinking that went on in Yorkshire;

but how you can spend year after year there without becoming a Friar Tuck passes comprehension. I lugged along that hamper of pottery quite safely (is it Chanak, or Jarnak, or Jamrach, or Anak?); and my wife is very grateful to you for your kindness. I don't think I at all made the proper speeches to you and Mrs. Reid on leaving; but, really, when I think on all the trouble I gave you, and the superhuman way in which you looked pleased at having to breakfast somewhere in the regions of the day before, words would fail. The whole visit was delightful. I am sending you, when I can get a box, one of those three Hispano-Moresque dishes of mine. It will make a variety among your Tunisian ware. If you hang it on the wall, tilt it a little bit forward, so that it may catch the light. Please give my very kind regards to Mrs. Reid and the children.

Yours very faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

REFORM CLUB, PALL MALL,
March 26, 1881.

MY DEAR REID,—All right; I shall be glad to dine with you on April 8th. Norman Lockyer and I start on a little trip to the Highlands on Monday (why not ask him, too? This is cheeky, but you will thank me), and are sure to be back by that date. The mysterious Bret Harte wanted to join us in our expedition, and possibly may (in order to grumble all the time); but, in any case, if you want to write to him, address the U. S. Consulate, Glasgow. But you need not pretend any longer there is such a person as Mudford. "Get out, Sairy! Not if you was to show me Mrs. Harris's own 'andwriting would I believe it."

Ah, well, you don't know what I think of the review you have just sent. Sometimes it seems scarcely worth while to try to do one's best work; and then again when

you find here and there some one who seems to see what you have been aiming at, you take courage again. But it's a weariful world, and all the ramjangle of it will sooner or later be over.

Yours always,

WILLIAM BLACK.

The reference to Mr. Mudford, the distinguished editor of the *Standard*, in the foregoing letter, was due to the fact that on several occasions I had endeavored to bring about a meeting between my two friends, each of whom had a sincere admiration for the other. But some evil fate always interposed itself at the last moment, and Black and Mudford never met. The dinner-party to which reference is made above was just as unlucky in this respect as previous engagements had been, and to the day of his death Black would insist upon the thesis that Mudford was a wholly mythical person. As for Bret Harte, although he accepted the invitation he failed to turn up at the dinner-table, but in his place came a telegram, in which I was invited to ask Black and Lockyer, who had just spent a few days with him in Scotland, their opinion of the game of poker —evidence that they had not spent all their time in Scotland in viewing scenery.

Towards the end of May, Black began his usual preparations for the writing of a new novel. This was *Shandon Bells*. I have already told the story of his friend William Barry, who died not long after Black's success had been established. There were very few men who had secured a more lasting hold upon Black's affections than Barry, and ever since

the death of the latter his old comrade had been thinking of making him the subject of one of his stories. Black had only known Barry, however, during his life in London as a journalist and literary free-lance, and it was necessary that he should acquaint himself with the scenery in which his early life was spent, in order to provide a proper setting for the novel. Accordingly he went to the south of Ireland towards the close of May, 1881, and visited Cork and the neighborhood, viewing the scenery which he afterwards described in *Shandon Bells*. The only letter that I have obtained written by him while in Ireland was the following, addressed to an American friend with whom he was on terms of intimacy:

To R. R. Bowker.

ECCLES HOTEL, GLENGARIFF,
June 1, 1881.

MY DEAR BOWKER,—Thank you very much for *Uncle Remus;* it has lightened many weary hours of railway travelling. What I like best in it is the character of the old nigger himself, and his relations with the little chap: most excellent both. As for the tales themselves, these legends of the smaller and more helpless animals overcoming the stronger animal by superior astuteness are common to the early mythologies of nearly all countries, and I have long had the notion that they were the invention of a conquered race "taking it out of" their conquerors by these fanciful stories. However, on this point I would advise you to consult the gauger (Bret Harte), the extent and accuracy of whose erudition you must have seen and admired. Thanks to the absence of that inveterate comparison-monger, I have enjoyed this south of Ireland trip immensely. I like the people, and the

scenery is lovely, and the weather superb. So what better do you think I can do than call my next novel, by way of gratitude, *Shandon Bells?* How's that, umpire? I am thinking of describing a young Irishman's fight through the journalism of London, with a few things intermixed. To-morrow I go on to Killarney, and expect to be home in a few days. I hope you will run down to Brighton for a Sunday before we leave for Scotland.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

His work in Ireland completed, Black and his family turned north for their annual holiday. On this occasion he selected Lerags, on Loch Feochan, as the scene of their autumn rest. He deserved a rest this year, more especially because he had completed, in addition to his novel of *Sunrise,* a shorter story called *That Beautiful Wretch.* The name had suggested itself to him because it was one which at that time he often gave to his elder daughter Mabel. At Lerags he and his family amused themselves with a small steam-yacht, dubbed by him alternately the *Kettle* and the *Devil.* During the summer he entertained many of his friends in his Highland quarters—Norman Lockyer, Colin Hunter, E. A. Abbey, and the Mortens being of the number.

To Miss Morten.

LERAGS,
July 15, 1881.

We are well pleased with this place, and Mabs has already got back the color (" and more ") that she had before the accident. Maggie and Cluny Macpherson drove out and spent yesterday here. The weather very variable—

generally wet during the night and morning, and blazing sunlight all day (this is a better arrangement than the reverse). I have succeeded in bringing back an old sprain by jumping from a stone wáll with a gun in my hand. Luckily, I didn't find out the mischief till I got back, for I was a mile and a half from home, away up a hill-side, and it was getting dusk. The blessed thing is going off, however, and I expect the steam-yacht round to-morrow.

So we'll hop o'er the runnels
And climb up the gunwales
And spread our black funnels
Abaft on the breeze!

(Air: "Away, away, on tons of coal.")

Tell your mamma I have received her letter. Why does she trouble herself about the society journals? She needn't buy them unless she pleases. She had much better send her money to the poor-box. (Address Lerags, N. B., care of Yours faithfully,

W. B.)

I've got a new name for the yacht—the *Coal Scuttle.*

To Dr. Lauder Brunton.

LERAGS, LOCH FEOCHAN,

July 17th.

MY DEAR BRUNTON,—It is exceedingly kind of you to send me your new book. Just fancy how opportune its arrival is: this being a thorough-going wet Sunday in the Highlands, and not a book worth reading in the house. Moreover, I am very curious to see how you will comport yourself in the domain of Mosaic chronology. But man in his time plays many parts—if that is the right quotation. I have just been asked to open a bazaar in aid of the Free Church in Oban!

This is a very pretty place, wet or no wet. It is beauti-

fully wooded, with waterfalls and glens and glimpses of the sea. Is there any chance of Mrs. Brunton and you coming through this way this year? We should be so pleased to see you. And if you would only help us to vivisect a few thousand rabbits (quite as interesting as frogs) by the aid of Eley's cartridges, you would earn the gratitude of the farmers around. The place is four and a half miles from Oban; but I would at a moment's notice send in a carriage for you, or come round in our noble steam-yacht (of fifteen tons). I hope you are well and not doing too much work. Kind regards to Mrs. Brunton from both of us.

Yours always,
WILLIAM BLACK.

Another letter, though of slightly different date, to Sir Lauder Brunton may be inserted here because of its bearing upon a subject touched upon in the foregoing note. It will be seen from it that Black had no sympathy with the extreme anti-vivisection school:

To Dr. Lauder Brunton.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
November 18th.

MY DEAR BRUNTON,—You will see that the *Daily News* has already referred to the Ferrier case—I think fairly and temperately. The anti-vivisectionists are raising a strong feeling against themselves by their preposterous violence. To me the thing seems very absurd; for I know there is more cruelty enacted in a single night on an estate where rabbits are snared than vivisection could accomplish in a century. What about coursing hares, which doesn't even pretend to be a form of obtaining food? I suppose you know that after a battue of pheasants the

keepers go out *the next day* to pick up the wounded birds: these must have had a fine night of it. . . . We have a variety of visitors. Toole called this afternoon, and Herbert Spencer is coming in to-night to play billiards; so you could suit yourself.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

Even at Lerags he was not allowed entire rest. The demand for his work was at this time greater than it had ever been before, and it was particularly great in the United States. Harper & Brothers were anxious to secure original contributions from his pen for their magazine, and he was constrained by their insistence to break through his excellent rule and devote some, even of his holiday hours, to work. The following letter refers to a proposal that he should write a paper on the West Highland people for *Harper's Magazine:*

To R. R. Bowker.

LERAGS,
August 9, 1881.

MY DEAR BOWKER,—When I first read your note my very gorge rose at the notion of doing any writing during my holidays—a trick I haven't tried for more than a dozen years; but then the opportunity of saying something about my beloved Highland folk was too tempting; and so I have written to Abbey. But I can't bind myself to any number of pages, so you must cut down the price accordingly. Perhaps I shall get up the required number if I take the freer form of making the article a letter addressed to you. I could then introduce some personal reminiscences that would look out of place in a formal article. I'll even forgive

you (if possible) for saddling me with this business when I have all a gamekeeper's cares on my shoulders. Do you know that it only wants three days to the 12th?

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To Mr. Crerar.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
January 10, 1882.

MY DEAR CRERAR,—A thousand thanks; the birds were in most excellent condition, and for the big one the children were allowed to wait up for a late dinner, which was a great treat for them. Don't imagine that these evidences of your kindness are swallowed and leave no trace behind; the plumage of the wild turkeys we have carefully preserved, and a more beautiful adornment of the children's dresses it is impossible to imagine. We all send you heartiest New Year greetings, and hope you will soon get rid of the weakness naturally following the fever. Tell Mr. Sutherland he is a bad man. What has become of his notion of taking a shooting in the Highlands? He ought to do that at once; bring you over here for a three months' recuperative holiday, and ask me for the 12th. Just see whether I would refuse! I went down to Lord Rosebery's country house at Epsom for a day or so at Easter last, and found that among other things American he had a lively recollection of the aviary. You talk about your weather. Our weather here has gone off its head. We have had nothing but gales and summer days mixed up together all through the winter; no snow as yet. Again best wishes for the New Year.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

Returning to Brighton in the autumn, he had settled down to his winter's work, the writing of

Shandon Bells. I think that this was as much a labor of love on Black's part as any task that he ever undertook. The memory of the brilliant young Irishman who had been his friend and companion during some of the most eventful years of his life was already fading. It was only the faithful few who still held him in remembrance, and looked back with mingled pleasure and pain to the days when their cheery companion was still with them. I need not say that Black was one of the faithful. For many a year there hung above his writing-table in his work-room at Paston House a large photograph of Barry. It hung there while *Shandon Bells* was being written; and in that story Black drew the picture—idealized, of course, but still in its essence true—of the man he had known and loved; and, talking of the book afterwards, he always spoke as though Willie Fitzgerald, the hero, and Barry were identical. It was the monument of his friend that he thus raised with infinite care and delicacy, and with the keenest desire that the world should see the dead man as he had seen him, with the partial eyes of affection. When the book was finished, he prefaced it with the following dedication: "To the memory of the author of *Moorland and Stream*, *Sporting Sketches*, and *Holiday Rambles*, and other writings; and to the memory of a long and intimate friendship; this book, which has been largely colored by both, is affectionately, but now aimlessly, dedicated." Black, as I have already said, seldom dedicated a volume of his, after those first successful novels, which he had laid at the feet of his wife.

This dedication, penned years after Barry's death, furnishes the strongest evidence of the place which his old friend had secured in his affections. To those who knew both men it is a pleasure now to think that they were knit together with a love passing that of brothers.

Shandon Bells was published in the first place in *Harper's Magazine*, and it achieved a great and immediate success. If it was not distinguished by the virile force of *Sunrise*—a force that was startling even to Black's admirers—it had many delightful qualities, akin to those which had captivated the reading public in his most popular novels. The beautiful scenery of the south of Ireland was described by the master-hand that had first revealed the glories of the western Highlands to the world, while over the whole story there broods an atmosphere of sympathetic tenderness which is in itself proof of the fact that in writing it Black wrote from his heart. He had often before selected his friends as models for the portraits that he drew, but he always put more of himself into his characters than of anybody else. In *Shandon Bells* he sought to take a different line. The work was to him, if one can compare things essentially so different, what *In Memoriam* was to Tennyson—no dramatic performance, but the memorial of a lost friend.

To R. R. Bowker.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
March 16, 1882.

MY DEAR BOWKER,—Will you please tell Messrs. Harper that their plans and arrangements are in every

way satisfactory, except as regards the iniquitous limitation of the publishing of the book to within a fortnight of the serial end. I would respectfully beg for an extension of that period. In any case the English book form might be allowed to appear a week before the American book form, as by no possible means (except angels' wings) could a copy be transferred to the States in time to forestall. Did I show you the curious coincidence mentioned in the enclosed letter? It might interest some of your American readers if you made a note of it in your Editor's Drawer. Garfield must have said that very shortly before his assassination. By-the-way, Robinson tells me that there is something about Garfield and these books of mine in Dr. Russell's *Hespereothen*. Now, if Messrs. Sampson Low & Company, of 181 Fleet Street, were nice people, they would send me a copy of that book. Can I have two more proofs of Part I.? Please, sir, it isn't me; it's the German translator who is at it this time.

(ENCLOSURE)

Andrew Carnegie to William Black.

I had a message for you from President Garfield. I dined with him a week or so before sailing, and the conversation turning upon my proposed coaching-trip, he said: "Why, that's the *Adventures of a Phaeton* over again, upon a grand scale. Has Black ever written anything so fine? I don't think he has. That was charming." He continued: "By-the-way, I'm provoked with him just now. A man has no right to end a novel so miserably as *Macleod of Dare* ends. *Human life has tragedies enough*—fiction should give us the bright side." I told him I expected to see you and would tell you this, and he laughed, and said, "Do so." When we heard of his fate at Chats-

worth, the words came back to me, and I have often thought of his look as he spoke them.

The writing of *Shandon Bells* finished, Black, amid the intervals of his customary life at Brighton, prepared himself for a longer journey than those which he usually took. For a long time some of his friends who knew the beauties of the South, and loved them, had been anxious that he should visit the Mediterranean and southeastern Europe, assuring him that he would find there material not less worthy of his powers as a descriptive writer than that which he had made his own in the Highlands. To this view Black always demurred. "Wretched chromo-lithographic sort of stuff," was the contemptuous phrase he was wont to use when any one spoke to him of a sunset in the Straits of Sicily or the afterglow in Egypt, or the weird loveliness of the Greek islands. This was before he had visited the East. In after-years he went often, and undoubtedly modified his opinion, but to the last he maintained his preference for the beauty of Scotch scenery, and for the atmospheric effects in which he insisted that the "land of the mountain and the flood" was infinitely richer than the arid mountain ranges of the East. In 1882 his friend Norman Lockyer had undertaken the leadership of an expedition to Egypt to observe the eclipse of that year. He invited Black to accompany him, and the latter eagerly accepted the opportunity of becoming acquainted with scenes which were as yet strange to him.

To Mrs. Kroeker.

REFORM CLUB,
March 29, 1882.

MY DEAR MRS. KROEKER,—Pray forgive me for not having answered your letter sooner. I have been up to the eyes in worry, getting things forwarded along for our trip to Egypt (I am going with the Eclipse expedition). You guessed rightly about this *Shandon Bells;* I had already assigned away the right of German translation; otherwise I should have been very glad if —— could have undertaken it. It is really wicked of you to talk about Chiselhurst when I am going up the Nile just at the time that the poisonous desert winds begin to blow. But if I come back, which is hardly probable, and if in the mean time you and Mr. Kroeker are not in prison for dynamite plots, my wife and I may make a raid on you.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

BRIGHTON,
April 3, 1882.

MY DEAR MRS. KROEKER,—I would gladly run over to see Mr. Kroeker and yourself before I go, but I have to go up to Scotland on Wednesday, and shall just be back in time for the *Kaiser-i-Hind* on the 19th. I hope I shall not have to express myself as disappointed with the Pyramids.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

P.S.—The spelling of oasis is quite simple. The singular is "oas-is" and the plural, of course, is "oas-are."

I do not think that the Egyptian expedition was an unqualified success. At all events, when Black returned from it, he had not modified his views about the chromo-lithographic nature of the scenery in the East. The lights and shades were too harsh,

and too strongly defined, he declared, and he could find a hundred Highland glens, all unknown to fame, that satisfied his sense of beauty infinitely more than the ruins and plains of Egypt, with the traditional splendor of the afterglow thrown in. His companions on the journey were struck by the fact that he showed an apparent indifference to the recognized "sights" which it is the duty of every tourist to visit and admire. He was happiest, as a matter of fact, in rambling about the bazaars, inspecting the quaint and beautiful objects that are to be had there at a price. His taste for bric-à-brac hunting had grown upon him with the years, and he was specially attracted by the beautiful old embroideries which form one of the staple articles of commerce in the Egyptian bazaars. He bought freely, and came home laden with his spoils; but on the whole, I am inclined to think, not specially satisfied with his first peep at the Far East. At the end of July he was again in Scotland, on this occasion choosing Stronelairg as the scene of his holiday. It was a most secluded spot, thirty-three miles from Inverness, and fifteen miles from the nearest landing-stage at Foyers, on the Caledonian Canal. Here he spent happy weeks, shooting, fishing, and meditating upon his next story, *Yolande*, part of the scenery of which was taken from his lonely holiday retreat.

To Norman Lockyer.

STRONELAIRG, N. B.,
September 13, 1882.

MY DEAR LOCKYER,—I am very glad to hear that you have had some decent shooting. It appears as though

the smaller moors had escaped scot-free, and only the bigger ones been nailed. There was very indifferent shooting here last year, and only seven hundred brace were killed; if fourteen hundred brace had been killed it would have been better for the place. All around here the birds were in enormous quantities in the spring; in a week the mischief was done, and the place is a wilderness, for our neighbors, Lord Lovat and Cunningham, of Foyers, have left their lodges vacant. However, all our interest is centred now upon deer (we are in the middle of three forests). They are already on the move, and I am liable to be summoned at any hour of the day or night. You have no idea how nice it is to start at 3.30 A.M. and make your way by yourself to your station in the hills in pouring rain; and then to sit perched up on the top of a precipice for a couple of hours. But there has not been enough rain really; and the deer have not come about the woods yet in any numbers—the beaters put out one stag and four hinds the other day, just behind the house, but the beasts doubled back—though now the wet has begun, and we are all expectation. I have only seen one roe-buck—which I shot—and rather a good one; but it is the muckle hart of Ben More that we are after. If you have any loch-fishing near you, send for some flies to Watson, Inglis Street, Inverness; he is an excellent maker. I have taken over three hundred trout out of the loch here—none small, none big, the biggest just over two pounds; but a welcome addition to the larder.

Yours very faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To Wemyss Reid.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,

November 14, 1882.

MY DEAR REID,—We are just getting settled down now, after getting back from Scotland; and I am in harness again, after the long holiday of the Egyptian and High-

land expeditions. The former middling—rather chromo-lithographic kind of stuff, the latter a failure, for the grouse disease had ravaged the moor; but I dare say I shall manage to pound something out of both. . . . We shall be delighted to see you in December. Let me know in good time when you are likely to be up.

Yours always,
WILLIAM BLACK.

P.S.—I am glad you like *Shandon Bells*. I can't do any better than that. But it won't suit the public; it is too introspective and lacking in incident. I hear there will be some sketches of Paston House in next month's *Harper*.

Writing to another friend, December 18, 1882, he says: "We had a woful experience in Scotland; the grouse disease came along and swept the moor clean, as you may see in some scurrilous verses in the Christmas number of *Society*, a copy of which somebody has just sent me. However, we had the novel experience of living up among mountains in an absolute wilderness, thirty-three miles from a town."

As the reader has already learned, it was Black's habit to fix upon some special place for his autumn holiday that he could introduce into the story he was writing. Year by year it is possible to trace the actual scenes of his novels by following him to his different holiday resorts. He went straight to nature for his colors and for the fair landscapes that he drew. And he never wasted an impression that he had received in any of his wanderings. Most of these impressions went direct into the little

note-books which he always carried with him, and to which he was accustomed to refer when he was hard at work at his desk at Brighton. But anything that did not go at once into the note-book was stored away in his retentive memory to be turned to account when needed. If a friend told him of some curious incident that had come within his knowledge, or some quaint remark that he had heard, the chances were that the incident or the remark would be found figuring in one of his stories. He wasted nothing that he thought could be of service to him in his work; and he was specially fond of gathering facts. The edifice he reared was of his own imagining; but the bricks of which it was built were in his eyes none the worse for being real, indisputable facts. One striking feature of his character was his resolute determination not to use up the impressions he had formed, or the good things that he had seen, in correspondence. His letters, as the reader must long ago have perceived, are very brief and prosaic in form. They do not furnish any real indication of his powers as a writer. If, for example, one wishes to know something of the impressions made upon him during his visit to Egypt it is not to his correspondence that one must go, but to the pages of *Yolande*.

That story, as a matter of fact, illustrates well the side of his character to which I am drawing attention. In 1882 he went first to Egypt with Sir Norman Lockyer, and afterwards to Stronelairg in Scotland. In *Yolande*, which he wrote in the autumn of the same year, he takes his heroine first

to Egypt and the Nile and afterwards to that lonely place in the Highlands to which he makes brief reference in the notes I have last quoted. It will be of interest to see how his remark about "the novel experience of living up among the mountains in an absolute wilderness, thirty-three miles from a town," is expanded in the story. Here is the true picture of Stronelairg as it is drawn for us in the pages of *Yolande*:

Far up in the wild and lonely hills that form the backbone, as it were, of eastern Inverness-shire, in the desert solitudes where the Findhorn and the Foyers first begin to draw their waters from a thousand mystic named or nameless rills, stands the lodge of Allt-nam-ba. The plain, little, double-gabled building, with its dependencies of kennels, stables, coach-house, and keeper's bothy, occupies a promontory formed by the confluence of two brawling streams, and faces a long, wide, beautiful valley, which terminates in the winding waters of a loch. It is the only sign of habitation in the strangely silent district, and it is the last. The rough hill-road leading to it terminates there. From that small plateau, divergent corries—softly wooded most of them are, with waterfalls half hidden by birch and rowan trees—stretch up still farther into a sterile wilderness of moor and lochan and bare mountain-top, the haunt of the ptarmigan, the red deer, and the eagle; and the only sound to be heard in these voiceless altitudes is the monotonous murmur of the various burns—the White Winding Water, the Dun Water, the Stream of the Red Lochan, the Stream of the Fairies, the Stream of the Corrie of the Horses, as they are called in the Gaelic. At the door of this solitary little lodge, on a morning towards the end of July, Yolande Winterbourne was standing

engaged in buttoning on her driving-gloves, but occasionally glancing out at the bewildering, changeful, flashing, and gleaming day around her. For, indeed, since she had come to live at Allt-nam-ba she had acquired the conviction that the place seemed very close up to the sky, and that this broad valley, walled in by those great and silent hills, formed a sort of caldron, in which the elements were in the habit of mixing up weather for transference to the wide world beyond. At this very moment, for example, a continual phantasmagoria of cloud effects was passing before her eyes. Far mountain-tops grew blacker and blacker in shadow; then the gray mist of the rain stole slowly across and hid them from view; then they reappeared again, and a sudden shaft of sunlight would strike on the yellow-green slopes and on the bowlders of wet and glittering granite. But she had this one consolation—that the prospect in front of the lodge was much more reassuring than that behind. Behind—over the mountainous ranges of the moor—the clouds were banking up in a heavy and thunderous purple; and in the ominous silence the streams coming down from the corries sounded loud; whereas, away before, the valley that led down to the haunts of men was for the most part flooded with brilliant sunlight, and the wind-swept loch was of the darkest and keenest blue. Altogether there was more life and motion here—more color and brilliancy and change—than in the pale and placid Egyptian landscape she had grown accustomed to.

There is no need to speak of the beauty of this description or of its manifest fidelity to truth. It was Black himself who stood at the door of the little Highland lodge that day and noted everything—the hills, the streams, the sky, the clouds—with his keen eye, and who compared the scene with the

Egyptian landscapes upon which he had been looking a few weeks before. It was he who sketched the scene for us in words that at once impress it upon the reader's mind. But to his friends, in writing from Stronelairg, he says nothing of all this—nothing beyond the curt remark that it is absolutely lonely, and thirty-three miles from the nearest railway station. I might have drawn similar pictures of his surroundings on his autumn holidays from many others of his stories, but one instance will, I think, suffice, to bring home to the reader the care with which he introduced his actual surroundings into any story that he was writing. His real workshop was not the little room at Brighton, but the open air, amid the scenery in which he was most at home.

To Norman Lockyer.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,

June 17, 1883.

MY DEAR LOCKYER,—I got the books all right, and hope to return them this week. Here are some facts for you which may ward off rash conclusions. The public records in Shakespeare's time began the year March 25th; S. bought his Blackfriar's house in 1612, after it is supposed he had retired to Stratford; and Judith had to sign her mark, not her name, to an ordinary legal conveyance. Do you remember my telling you of a curious phenomenon I had seen up at Stronelairg? Very oddly, the other night at dinner Professor Grainger Stewart began and described this very thing, saying he had never heard of any one but himself having seen it. There is a description of it at page 65, volume three, *Yolande*, and if you were to get a copy of the book from Macmillan and reprint a short pas-

sage in *Nature*, that would fetch out some corroborative testimony most likely, perhaps even an explanation. Grainger Stewart gave up the conundrum.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

The passage in *Yolande* to which Black refers is as follows. I quote it as further evidence of the care with which he based all his descriptions of natural phenomena upon his own personal experiences: "The only extraordinary thing that I have seen or met with since you left me I ran across the other night on coming home from the shooting. We had been to the Far Tops, after ptarmigan and white hares, and got belated. Long before we reached home complete darkness overtook us. . . . I was trying to make out John Shortland's legs in front of me when I saw on the ground two or three small points of white fire. I thought it strange for glowworms to be so high above the level of the sea; and I called the others back to examine these things. But now I found, as they were all standing in the dark talking, that wherever you lifted your foot from the wet black peat, immediately afterwards a large number of these pale points of clear fire appeared, burning for about a minute and then gradually disappearing. Some were larger and clearer than others, just as you remember on a phosphorescent night at sea there are individual big stars separate from the general rush of white as the steamer goes on. We tried to lift some of the points of light, but could not manage it; so I take it they were not glowworms, or any other living creatures, but an

emanation of gas from the peaty soil; only that, unlike the will-o'-the-wisp, they were quite stationary, and burned with a clear white or blue-white flame, the size of most of them not bigger than the head of a common pin, and sometimes about fifteen or twenty of them appearing where one foot had been pressed into the soft soil."

I am indebted to a well-known literary man, living in Derbyshire, Mr. Bradbury, for some reminiscences of Black about this period in his life: "I first became acquainted with William Black at Oban, in the summer of 1880, although through his enchanting novels I had long been his admirer, and subsequently saw him in his home at Brighton. Although an unerring shot and an expert angler, he was a humanitarian, and a warm lover of animated nature. He reprimanded in kindly tones some donkey-drivers at Brighton when I was walking with him, because of their cruelty to their docile animals. Then he said, 'What a pity it is that these poor brutes have no conception of suicide.' It was my privilege to meet Black in the Highlands during several successive summers, sometimes at Ardconnel, near Oban, sometimes at the Alexandra Hotel, favored alike by tourist and landscape-painters, and sometimes at his house on the shores of Loch Feochan, where we caught salmon and shot grouse and such small deer as rabbits. Black used to sail from Loch Feochan to Oban in a yawl, a smaller boat than the *Ringdove*, which braves the waves so buoyantly in *White Wings* under the name of the *White Dove*.

"Every fisherman and sailor in the land of Lorne was attached to William Black, and many would have died for him. Mere money cannot purchase the cheerful loyalty they unfailingly paid to him. As a yachtsman he was intimate with every cape and creek, every bay and buoy, every headland and haven, from the Firth of Clyde to Thurso. To some yachtsmen every sea-bird is a gull, but Black could identify every winged thing on the water. There are not a few good stories current in and about Oban regarding Black. He loved children as much as he loved beautiful things of the natural world. I have seen him, when passing through the Crinan Canal, select from the crowds of children who follow the tourists, under pretence of selling nuts and milk, the most poorly clad and least beautiful in order to distribute money among them, leaving the comely and pretty to the attention they were certain to receive from his fellow-travellers. Once, at Iona, I saw him carrying a box of books to a crofter's cottage, a gift for one or two struggling lads on the isolated island who were striving to add to their store of knowledge even amid the hard surroundings of their daily life. It was on a trip by one of Mr. McBrayne's boats from Oban to Staffa and Iona—Mr. McBrayne, by-the-way, should certainly call one of his steamers the *William Black* in recognition of all that Black has done for the western Highlands — that I and a companion, the late much-beloved John Cumming Bates, the proprietor and editor of the *Buxton Advertiser*, saw much of Black's innate modesty of character. The steamer was the *Chev-*

alier. Black, who was dressed in a blue yachting suit, was mistaken by one of the passengers, a clergyman, for an official of the ship, and asked to name the various islands and headlands in view. This he did with great readiness. 'Thank you, purser, thank you very much,' said the clergyman, when Black had finished his enumeration. 'I have read all about these places in Mr. William Black's novels. You should really find time to read them; you really should, I am sure.' Black modestly replied that he would certainly obtain and read the works in question. At Iona we landed and climbed the steep hill to St. Oran. Within and without the chapel are tombs of kings and chieftains of untold antiquity. 'Here,' said the guide, 'is the tomb of Macleod of Macleod.' 'Oh! I'm so disappointed,' ejaculated a vivacious American lady with Black's well-known novel in her hand; 'I would not have come if I had known. I thought we were going to see the grave of Macleod of Dare.'

"Mr. Bret Harte, when he was American Consul at Glasgow, often visited Black at Oban. On one occasion a German band had taken up its position in front of the Alexandra Hotel, where the two novelists were staying, and was braying out its brazen music with great vigor. Presently a Highland piper took up his position near the band, and with mincing step and many flourishes gave full voice to his instrument. 'I just bet the piper will beat the Teutons,' said Mr. Harte. And he was right. The band retired discomfited. 'But that isn't the real piping at all,' observed Black.

'Is the real thing, then, more intense?' asked Harte. 'Yes; you should hear a band of pipers, say at Edinburgh. Their combined music was once described by an entranced listener as "jest like paradise." Was it not Sydney Smith who said that his idea of heaven was eating *foie gras* to the sound of trumpets? A Scotchman would have said bagpipes instead of trumpets.'"

In confirmation of Mr. Bradbury's estimate of Black as a yachtsman I may mention that once, after a very rough and difficult passage, during which Black had been at the helm all the time, the skipper, not ordinarily given to compliments, said: "Well, sir, if all else fails, Mr. Black himself will always be able to be a pilot on this coast; he knows it so well."

CHAPTER VI

AMERICAN FRIENDSHIPS

American Friends in London—*Yolande*—*Judith Shakespeare*—Black as a Salmon-fisher—Mr. Marston's Reminiscences—Loch Naver—The Novelist on His Methods of Work and the Worth of His Critics—Letter to His Niece—His Love of Family—Letter to His Daughter—Friendship with Miss Mary Anderson—Mad Pranks—Black's First Appearance on the Stage—And His Last—An Imaginative Reporter—*Strange Adventures of a Houseboat*—Mr. Bowker's Reminiscences—*Sabina Zembra*—Suffering from the Vagus Nerve.

BLACK'S friendships between the eighties and nineties were largely formed among Americans visiting or resident in England. He had never forgotten the pleasant days which he had spent on the other side of the Atlantic; and in his visit to the United States may be found the origin of the deep interest that he took in everything associated with the great republic. But it was not until 1881 that he began to form that circle of intimate friends of American birth in which he found so much pleasure during his later years. He did not lose touch with his older friends. He remained on terms of close intimacy with the artists in whose work he delighted, and his personal friends were just as dear to him as they had ever been. But he threw himself with characteristic impetuosity into

the society of the Americans resident in London, and henceforth for several years I think that he was more frequently to be found in their company than in that of his fellow-countrymen. His Celtic nature found something congenial in the nervous, highly strung temperament of the average American. He had never, as I have shown, been altogether at home in ordinary English society. His fidelity to old friends alone reconciled him to the companionship of many of those who had been his life-long associates; but with his fellow-Celts, and with the brilliant, quick-witted American, he became friends at once, as though by instinct. In the first instance, he was thrown into contact with the American circle in London by the business relations which sprang up between himself and the representatives in England of the great publishing house of Harper's. New lights were arising in the world of English fiction, and Black's day, which had once been one of almost unparalleled brilliancy, was beginning, as was inevitable in the nature of things, to be less brilliant. It is given to no writer in this world of changing tastes and ideals to retain supreme control of the reading public for an indefinite period. Sooner or later, unless the writer's life be prematurely cut short, new gods arrive, and the fervor of the old worship subsides. Even the great Scott experienced the common fate, and no lesser man can claim to have been exempt from it. Black's admirers were very faithful, and to the very end he retained a host of them; but the charm of novelty which, in his earlier works, had

fascinated the reading public, was inevitably lost with the passage of the years, and writers of a different school began to contest with him the supremacy that he had so long enjoyed without serious rivalry or dispute. Yet, while this was the case in England, it was notable that in America his popularity seemed to grow, rather than to wane, as time advanced; and undoubtedly, from 1882 onward, the number of his admirers and readers was probably greater in the United States than in his own country. *Shandon Bells* had been published in 1882 as the principal serial in *Harper's Magazine* for that year; and after that many of his novels were first given to the world through that medium. The agents of the Harpers in London were men who were worthy of the distinguished place they held as the representatives of American journalism and literature in England. With some of them, and notably with James Osgood and J. Henry Harper, he became on terms of real and deep affection. In all of them he found congenial and intimate friends. Naturally, he became known through them to great numbers of their fellow-countrymen and countrywomen who were either residing in England or temporarily passing through it, and, as I have stated, the consequence was the creation of that circle of cultured Americans in which he was during the remainder of his life a distinguished and admired figure.

The American public, long after Black's features had become familiar in England, were still anxious to know something of his person and his

life; and in December, 1882, there appeared in *Harper's Magazine* the article describing Paston House from which some extracts have been given in a previous chapter. The article was accompanied by a portrait, copied from a photograph.

To Mr. Bowker.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
June 16, 1882.

MY DEAR BOWKER,—I enclose two photographs that I have hunted out; at all events they are better, I think, than the photograph of Pettie's picture. This was really a side sketch when he was painting "The Man in Armor," and a fanciful sketch, too; for I don't generally walk about in an overcoat without a hat, and I don't stand bolt upright when I am smoking, and I never wear a flower in my buttonhole. . . . Yours always,

WILLIAM BLACK.

Shandon Bells increased Black's circle of readers in America, and though the story was, as he himself said, of too thoughtful and introspective a character to be as widely popular in England as some of his previous books, it had many warm admirers among those whose praise was distinctly worth having. Among others, the late William Allingham, the poet, wrote to Black to congratulate him on the completion of this touching and delightful tribute to his dead friend:

To William Black.

SANDHILLS, WITLEY,
December 5, 1883.

MY DEAR MR. BLACK,—It gratified me much to receive your kind gift of *Shandon Bells*, and I have read the charm-

ing story with real interest and delight. I am a Northerner, but from Donegal, the most Irish of Ulster counties, with mountains and sea-bays and fishful rivers, and a pleasant-mannered, very poor people. Perhaps I was the more at home in the story for personal reasons. I was older than Fitzgerald, and scarcely so handsome, when I made my first attack upon London, but still young, and there is, perhaps, somewhere in a dusty drawer a rejected review of a novel which I wrote at that time on Rhadamanthine principles. (My mother's mother, by-the-by, was Kitty Fitzgerald, and I was nothing but "Master Willie" for many an early year.) Your characters are lifelike, and pleasant human beings, the scenes in which they move enchantingly painted, and there is a very wholesome and kindly tone throughout. I shall always recollect the book with an agreeable sensation, and not the less for connecting it with my own little fairy rhyme. . . .

Very truly yours,
W. ALLINGHAM.

Yolande, which followed *Shandon Bells*, was written in the autumn and winter of 1882, the scene of the story being laid, as I have already told, in the remote district of Stronelairg, where the Scotch holiday of that year had been spent. The story was published in the first place as a serial in the *Illustrated London News*.

In *Yolande* the heroine is a young girl who rescues her mother, at great cost to herself, from the evil habit of indulgence in narcotic drugs. How careful Black was to gain accurate information upon every subject he touched in his novels the following letter will show:

To Dr. Lauder Brunton.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,

January 1, 1883.

MY DEAR BRUNTON,—I suppose the following information that I want could be got out of some of your books, and if you would have the great kindness to tell me which it is, I will get it through a bookseller here. I would not bother you (for you are sure to be busily occupied just now), but the whole of my next novel turns upon this point, and I want to be accurate.

1. About what time chloral began to be used by lay persons.

2. Also chlorodyne.

3. Is there much difference (in a general, not in a strictly scientific, way) between them?

4. What dose would a woman take who was breaking herself of the habit, felt very bad, and had for once to return to her old enemy?

5. What effect would the same dose have on a person of eighteen or twenty who had never touched stimulant of any kind?

6. What is the taste (I mean to an unvitiated palate) and the odor?

Of course, I don't want precise scientific information (I am not going in for a murder trial), but just the briefest statement. If it isn't in any of your books perhaps you could recommend me one. Pray forgive all the bother.

Yours always,

WILLIAM BLACK.

It was very early in 1883 that Black began to evolve the story of *Judith Shakespeare*. He had already studied with care the life of Shakespeare and the condition of contemporary England as it has been revealed to us by the work of Shakespearian

students. There was no story of Black's which involved him in more serious labor than this of *Judith Shakespeare.* It is something more than a romance. It is a genuine and valuable study of the England of Shakespeare's day, and of the circumstances which surrounded his name at Stratford-on-Avon. When it was completed, Mr. Halliwell Phillips, the eminent Shakespearian student and authority, wrote to Black to say that after reading the novel he felt that he could no longer be considered *the* Shakesperian authority of the day. The mantle had fallen upon Black's shoulders. But when his friends first heard of Black's intention to write a story on such a subject, and to bring the greatest of all the figures in our literary history into the pages of a novel, some of them, at least, were filled with genuine apprehension. To one of these friends, to whom he had communicated his intention, and who had written to point out to him the difficulties and dangers he must encounter if he persevered in his scheme, Black wrote as follows :

I am greatly obliged by your hints *re* Shakespeare, and quite see the force of what you say, but perhaps I didn't sufficiently explain that the awful figure of Billy will only appear as a sort of presence in the background. It is the young woman I should have to deal with ; and I should make her a modern young woman (only she couldn't write her own name) in the modern scenery and atmosphere of Warwickshire. I should have very little antiquarianism for any pedantic creature to quarrel with, and, as regards contemporaries and contemporary events, I should beg

Furnivall, or some other good Christian, to go over the proofs to insure accuracy. However, we will postpone the subject until you come up to London.

Black did not do justice to himself in his slighting reference to antiquarianism. As I have said, he studied deeply and seriously for many months the Shakesperian literature before he began his work. When it was finished, it was to Mr. Halliwell Phillips, not Dr. Furnivall, that the proofs were submitted, and I have already given the verdict which was pronounced upon them by this erudite authority. None the less, it is true that the story betrays nothing of the pedant or the mere student. The spirit of life breathes through it, and makes its people living and lovable human beings, who move in their archaic world as the men and women of to-day move in ours, though no anachronism is to be found in the story to destroy its effectiveness. Shakespeare himself is never mentioned by name, but only as "Judith's father," yet he remains, as Black promised in the foregoing letter, a constant figure in the background. The work when it appeared was recognized as a real and remarkable *tour de force*, and it was received with special enthusiasm by the American readers, to whom it was first introduced in the pages of *Harper's Magazine*.

In the autumn of 1883 Black went to Altnaharra, in Sutherlandshire, to fish. This wild and lonely spot was for many years a favorite resort of his, and he used it both in *White Heather* and *Donald Ross of Heimra*. He was an expert fisherman,

and quite as enthusiastic in landing a salmon as in stalking a deer. He threw a most delicate fly, using a particularly long line, and those who have fished with him declare that they have known few anglers more skilful. It was in 1872, when he visited the island of Lewis for the purpose of studying the scenery for *A Princess of Thule*, that he caught his first salmon in Loch Roag. After that he fished almost every year, and with almost uniform success. He tried Ireland on more than one occasion, and was a successful fisher in the Shannon. For several seasons he made Altnaharra his headquarters for fishing, sharing Loch Naver with his brother-in-law, Mr. Morten. Then he went to the Oykel, and fished there for more than a dozen years. In addition to these he had odd seasons on the Ness, the Spean, and Loch Awe. How many salmon he caught in his life it would be difficult to compute, but Mrs. Black declares that the number is to be counted by the hundred. More than once on Loch Naver he landed his three good fish in a day, and on one memorable occasion his bag consisted of five salmon. The sport, when he was engaged in it, seemed to absorb every faculty of his nature, and it may be questioned if a more enthusiastic angler ever lived. To the last he declared that the triumphant joy of playing and landing your fish never grew stale in the heart of the true fisherman. He was one of those anglers who can delight in their favorite sport even when they are far from loch or river. I have seen him standing at the head of the drawing-room staircase in Paston House practising with a great rod over the

hall beneath him, and whenever opportunity served he had his rods put together and his lines unreeled. He taught his children to throw a long and fine line, and nothing delighted him more than the skill which they attained in the sport. Fishing, in short, was nothing less than a passion with Black. It figures largely, as all his readers know, in his books, but it played a still greater part in his real life. It formed a bond of union between himself and friends with whom he had little else in common, while it strengthened the ties which united him to men of letters such as Mr. Lang, who was once his guest during the spring season on the Oykel, and who bears testimony to his extraordinary keenness in the sport.

Critics have at times complained of the extent to which fishing and shooting, yachting and deer-stalking occupy his novels. If he had been one of those cockney sportsmen who eke out a small sporting experience in their writings for the sake of attracting a certain class of readers, there would have been reason in this complaint, but this was not the case. The element of sport figures so largely in his writings simply because he could not help it. He loved his rod, his gun, or the tiller of a sailing-boat, and he had a strong conviction that all healthy and manly men ought to share his love for such things. He did not sit down of set purpose to write a sporting novel. In the very nature of things it would have been hateful to him to do so; nor did he ever in any story forget his main theme—the fortunes of his hero and heroine. But when the

opportunity occurred, he delighted to take the characters of his fictions through the sports which afforded him so much joy, and into one narrative or another he interwove his own happy adventures on loch, on river, or moor. It is in this way that Black's novels are to be differentiated from the ordinary sporting story. The sport comes into them naturally, born of his own wealth of experience, and in nothing that he wrote—not even in his vivid pictures of scenery—was he more absolutely natural and honest than in those pages in which he recounted, under a thin veil of fiction, his own exploits with the salmon-rod at Altnaharra and other spots not less beloved.

I am permitted to quote from an article in *The Country* a description by his friend Mr. Robert Marston of Black as a fly-fisher:

"Marston, when you have fished this pool I want you to go on up the river with Colin, up to the Badsteps, and then fish down, and Morten and I will meet you at the Burn for lunch."

Alas! that the two friends standing on the bank, looking the picture of health and strength, were to see but few more springs drive winter out of the charming valley of the Oykel in their beloved Highlands.

The speaker was my late friend William Black, by whose and our mutual friend Morten's invitation I was a guest at Langwell Lodge one spring a few years ago. Millions have read Black's novels, strong, sweet, fresh as the mountain air, but to have fished with him and day after day to have lived in his delightful company was indeed a rare pleasure. Spring salmon-fishing in the far north of Scotland is dependent on the weather. Any one who has en-

joyed it knows what this means. After a day or two of almost summer weather you may wake up to find nature has whitewashed everything, and that a howling snow-storm makes the sweet-smelling peat fire more attractive than the side of the dark salmon-pool lashed into foam by the freezing eastern gale. Then we three fishermen toasted our toes at the pleasant blaze, listening to the "howling of the wolves," as Black termed it, and told tales of sport with rod and gun. My part was chiefly to listen, for my friends had fished and shot and lived together for many a long year, and had an inexhaustible mine of memories to draw upon, not of sport only, but on every subject of any human interest. I have heard it said that William Black was only a pen-sportsman, that the unequalled descriptions of deer-stalking and salmon-fishing to be found in his delightful stories were the work of his imagination only, but I can assert absolutely that this is not the case. His descriptions are from actual personal experience, as any sportsman who reads them must at once see.

I have seen him wading waist-deep in the ice-cold river, sending his salmon fly out gracefully over the long Langwell Pool, covering every yard of the cast, seen his light Castleconnell bending as he struck a lively fish, watched him as the fish tore the line off the reel, seen his face flush with quiet excitement as the fish dived into the air or made for some dangerous place. And when the battle was over, and the clean-run, silvery salmon was lying at our feet on the bank, Black would say, "That twenty minutes was worth a month in London."

To Norman Lockyer.

ALTNAHARRA,

September 5, 1883.

MY DEAR LOCKYER,—Glad to hear you are in the Highlands, and hope Romanes is teaching you that Mun-

chausen trick of shooting three or four grouse in a line. As for fishing, the season here stops on Monday next, and we all go off to the familiar Alexandra (Oban) next day. But the autumn fishing of Loch Naver (which loch Morten and I have rented for next year, and which I shall probably take a lease of) is a thing of naught: it is a spring salmon loch (the best in Sutherlandshire), with the season beginning January 10th. So if on January 10th next you will present yourself here, you will find the little inn very comfortable, and the salmon elbowing each other to get into your boat. But I would not, if I were you, leave my overcoat behind. I have had no holiday this year; but the change of air has pulled me up, and I am going back to have another bang at Master William.

Yours always,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,

February 25, 1884.

MY DEAR LOCKYER,—Dolly Morten says you mentioned the salmon-fishing the other day. I haven't written to you because it was no use—the river has been frozen over; but on Thursday last the first salmon was caught, by the keeper; so if you like to run the risk of the weather, and can find a companion to go with you, the place is open to you. Wire to Mr. Mackay, Oykel Bridge Inn, by Lairg, N.B., to have a trap waiting for you at Invershin Station. He also will find you a gillie. I can't go up just now—just finishing my work; but W. L. Bright and I propose to go on the evening of March 9th, unless the reports of the weather are too discouraging. There is plenty of room on the river for three rods, and you could stay to the end of March if you have the time. But it's all a question of luck as regards the weather. *I* don't mind; I mean to take some work with me, and if I'm frozen up will have

a big peat-fire in my bedroom and turn out manuscript like a mangle. Let me know what you think. I cannot take the risk of advising you. I have asked the keeper to send me word as to the prospects; but that again is not much use; the whole condition of affairs might change in twelve hours. Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

In March, Black went up to the Naver with Mr. Leatham Bright, and enjoyed the sport to his heart's content. I remember that we dined together on the night on which he started for the north, and he was in the high spirits of a boy who had finished his task and was on the eve of his holidays. The weather was cold in London, and promised to be still colder in Sutherlandshire, but he rejoiced in the prospect of snow and sleet and fierce wintry winds, and exulted in the thought of the salmon he was to induce from the cold waters of the loch into his boat. The sport that season was not particularly good, but he came back to London looking a perfect picture of health, with bronzed face, roughened skin, and hardened figure — a salmon-fisher rather than an author to the very tips of his fingers.

To Mr. Crerar.

REFORM CLUB,

June 1, 1884.

MY DEAR CRERAR,—I shall be delighted to welcome Mr. Gordon when he comes over, and hope I shall not fail to be in London when he arrives. But that is doubtful, for to-morrow Matthew Arnold, E. A. Abbey, and I start away on a coaching trip under the guidance of Mr. Carnegie. However, we only go through the southern counties of

England, and the tour won't last long. I wish you were here to-day to join a little dinner-party I am giving, at which several Americans will be present—Bret Harte, John Hay, Abbey, Clarence King, Carnegie, and so forth. Carnegie tells me your business prospects look brighter; but I hope the Wall Street affair won't make much difference. Things are pretty bad here at present, and artists can't get their pictures sold at all. I have but recently got back from Sutherland, where I had six weeks' salmon-fishing in Loch Naver. We caught one hundred and two, of which I had thirty-two. In the autumn there will be no fishing for us. I propose to take my wife and the small ones a trip down the Mediterranean in a Cunarder.

Yours very faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

The appearance of the first instalment of *Judith Shakespeare* in the January number of *Harper's Magazine* in 1884 brought the usual flood of criticism about his head. As I have already told, he did not like criticism, and set but a small value upon it. When he could he avoided reading the press notices of his books; but sometimes this was hardly possible, and then he was irritated not so much by the severity of a criticism as by the slipshod inaccuracy of the critic.

To Wemyss Reid.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,

December 27, 1883.

MY DEAR YOUTH,—You ought to know by this time that the ways of reviewers are past finding out. On Wednesday last week there was a notice in that same *D. N.* of the first part of *Judith Shakespeare*. In that part, Judith

is represented as having a suitor, John Quiney, who is, of course, well known to her. A wizard appears and tells her she will marry a man she has not yet seen, and tells her how she may get sight of him. Whereupon the critic observes that the intelligent (!) novel-reader will immediately see that the wizard and Tom Quiney are one and the same person; but that this should not be perceived by Judith Shakespeare herself is one of the mystifications which are within the privilege of the novelist. I say no; such a hopelessly fatuous mystification is not within the privileges of the novelist, but within the privileges of the incompetent critic who wishes to show himself clever. The same writer, professing to know something of the Shakespeare time and family, talks of Judith as being the "youngest" and having "sisters"! ! But why should one heed? I hope you will have clear weather in the south. It is dreadful here. *Bon voyage*, and a happy New Year to you and yours.

Yours faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

A letter of his which he addressed some years later to the editor of the *Daily Graphic* describes his views, not only with regard to critics and criticisms but on the writing of novels, so freshly and freely that I may insert it here:

Critics out of their kindness and condescension are so frequently given to teaching a writer of books his own business that the very humblest of a notoriously humble tribe may be forgiven if he would fain return the compliment and show the reviewers how a review should be written. But, first of all, let us see how the production that is to be considered and judged may have come to see the light. We will assume that it is a work of fiction.

We will say that the idea has quite unexpectedly occurred to the hapless author when he would far rather be let alone; probably his hands are full; perhaps he has been wistfully looking forward to an untrammelled holiday. But this unwelcome visitant takes possession of him in a most surprising manner. Before he can look about him he is whisked away into space. The unholy sprite by leaps and bounds drags him "through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier," and ends by introducing him to a certain number of phantoms, who gradually reveal themselves out of the surrounding obscurity. Alas, from that day this poor man is doomed! Those ghosts, as they become more and more visible, grow to be clamorous vampires. Nay, they are worse than any vampires; they demand not only blood, they demand bones and flesh, temperaments and dispositions, motives, actions, even clothes! And so, to pacify their insatiate claims, the luckless wretch has to go about and steal. He filches here a smile, and there the curve of a neck and shoulder, here some flash of a liquid eye, there some tranquil braid of hair; he ransacks his own experiences and studies those of his friends; he undertakes long journeys to provide that unappeasable crew with a blue sky and a vernal earth.

From morning till night, week in and week out, they haunt him everywhere. He may be wandering through the labyrinthine bazaars of Assiout; he may be staring into a salmon-pool in Ross-shire, waiting for the clouds to come over and obscure the sun; he may be in his orchard, trying to estimate what this year's crop of apples will fetch; but always beside him and around him are these implacable attendants. It is no use for him to remonstrate, or bid them begone; they take no heed of bad language; their pursuit is relentless. And by slow degrees, but inevitably, they become more real to him than his actual neighbors. He takes a woman into dinner, and after a

little while she says to herself, "Why, this is the stupidest fool I have ever met with in all my life"; whereas the fact is, the poor man is anxiously listening to those ghostly companions, and incessantly watching them. For by this time they have begun to do things; and just as often as not they are entirely beyond his control; so that while he is apparently busy with his soup, a murder may be taking place before his very eyes, and he unable to interfere!

Very well; after about a year or eighteen months of this pleasant sort of life he thinks he will begin and describe those people and their doings. For this purpose he probably demands absolute solitude. Sometimes he builds for himself an attic and has a ladder that he can draw up after him to guard against intrusion; sometimes he goes away into foreign parts; sometimes it is in a quiet corner of the library of his club that he proceeds to wrestle with the demons. And at first there is not much difficulty. During all this long time he has been becoming more and more familiar with them and their ways; while, as regards the mere task of writing, he has been at odd hours and moments coining and storing up phrases and sentences that come readily enough to hand when wanted. Most likely his chief aim at the outset is to get those characters to stand out solid and sharp; to have a strong light thrown full on them; to drive back the shadows that used to encompass them; the story, with all its shifting play and movement, will come later on. We will say, then, that after a week's incessant toil the rough draft of the introductory chapter lies on his desk.

But this is only a beginning. If he is a wise man and a lucky man, he will now go away for a couple of days golfing (during this interval he may amuse himself by considering what his imaginary people are going to do in chapter the second), and thereafter he will return to the manuscript with fresh eyes. For now he has got to see that, so far

as it has gone, the story has been told directly and clearly; no affected ingenuities, no rococo ornamentations, no cuttlefish tricks of style. Here or there he will find a redundant epithet: out with it! Here and there the conversation seems stiff: shake it loose and let it march freely. What time he may spend over this revision—over these two or three revisions—will depend on his own temperament; will depend on whether his literary conscience is elastic or inexorable. And if sentences not wholly approved of will haunt him—so that even as he may be enjoying a holiday tramp over Exmoor, or working the bow-oar of a gondola out on the lagoon, or walking with Schön Rohtraut by far northern seas, an impertinent and intruding phrase will suddenly present itself in his memory, and call for amendment — well, he must simply accept that as part of the inevitable travail to which he has laid his hand. And then, after a long and laborious year, perhaps a couple of long and laborious years, spent for the most part in dreams and clouds, the book is completed and issued.

And now comes in the reviewer's part of the business. He it is who (in his own estimation of his function in life) must tell us what is the net result and value of all this labor. And, perhaps, it might be invidious to seek to know his qualifications for the task, even as one would rather not inquire into his antecedents, or ask what originally induced him to take to such courses. It may be said, however, that it will advantage him greatly if he has himself, in bygone days, published a few neglected and forgotten novels, for that will enable him to fix with accuracy the date at which English fiction reached its zenith. There *were* writers who could write in those days, he will be able to say; but, alas! look at the sad times on which we have fallen now. Then, it is not in the least necessary that he should know everything; it is only neces-

sary that he should appear to know everything; and that, not in order to impress the public, but to impress his editor. Beyond and above all else, he must purge his mind of prejudice. He must be neither the disciple nor the apostle of any cult; and vigorously must he guard himself against the possibility of alien influence. If the wife of his bosom should show symptoms of what has been called Ibsenity, then must he divorce her (mentally) on the spot; let him remember that many schools may exist side by side; that wisdom is not confined to Boston, nor yet to the banks (especially the mud-banks) of the Seine. Let him lay to heart these words of Paul to the Corinthians: "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory." And he should pray Heaven for humility—which is always granted when the petitioner is sincere; pray that he may learn and labor truly to get his own living, and do his duty in that state of life unto which he has, unhappily, been called.

Now let him begin. And as a preliminary (though this has been doubted by some) he must read the book; and this must be no slouching, after-dinner, cigar-in-mouth sort of reading, but an indefatigable, close, and patient perusal which will take him four mornings between ten and one. This, of course, is only to get a fair and honest notion of the current of the story and its chief characters. Then, on the fifth morning, he will go back, and begin to consider the construction of the book; he will consider how certain things have been pieced together; he will inquire as to whether the events follow each other naturally, whether the people act consistently, whether the climax is in proper and inevitable sequence. In this second reading, too, he may have regard to points of style; and here, again, there shall be no exacerbated predilection for any one school, but a wise and gracious tolerance.

To the conscientious reviewer a third reading, to take in the general effect after he has studied the craftsmanship down to its minutest details, may now appear desirable; but we must not be too exacting. Perhaps he is himself a busy man, unless he happens to have a post in a government office. We will rather regard him as he sets to work after the second reading, when he has got into committee, as it were. And, first of all, he must not assume that the novel before him is the only kind of novel that the author has written; he must not say, "Here we have Mr. So-and-so, or Mrs. So-and-so, with all the well-known features, same old characters, same old incidents, same old plot," for that might be telling lies, and telling lies is naughty. If he has not read the author's other books, he must limit himself to the one he has in hand, and not presume a likeness where there may be the greatest diversity; and most carefully must he guard against taking it for granted that any opinions expressed by the characters in a story are the opinions of the writer of the story; for in this way it would be easy to convict one and the same author of being an Anarchist, a Tory, a Dissenter, a Catholic, a glutton, a vegetarian, a lover of the Stuarts, an anti-vaccinationist, and a poacher of spawning trout.

Nor must the reviewer allow any of his own opinions to interfere with his dispassionate judgment. "My son," said the curé to the workman whom he met in the road, "are you Jansenist or Molinist?" "Moi, mon père," was the reply, "je suis ébéniste." The reviewer must stick to his trade: we don't want to know what he thinks of republicanism or monarchical government; nor may he suffer his bias one way or the other to affect his consideration of the book before him. So he goes on with his review. As it is easier to discover defects than merits, he will naturally pay more attention to the latter; and if the writer of the novel be a lady he will not be too hard on

her Latin or her law or any tendency to slip into italics. As for such things as Goethe, bona fide, denoûement, and so forth, he will find these in anybody's book; but when he does find them he must not yell and howl and call on his gods to smite with thunder; he should understand that these are merely the little playfulnesses of the printer's reader, inserted after the author's final corrections have been sent in, and that all that is required of him (the reviewer) is that he should politely point out these small errors, and request that they be removed from the next edition.

On the whole, it will be better to write out a rough draft of the review, and then scrupulously, and diligently, revise it. Its style ought to be an example; also its tone, its bland magnanimity. It must not be patronizing, or, perhaps, it may be slightly so, for something must be allowed for long habit. And now we may consider this careful and admirable composition fairly completed, all pruned and polished and perfect. Now let the reviewer fold the MS. neatly, and tie it up, and seal it with wax. But there is no need for him to address the little parcel; the best thing he can do with it now is—to thrust it in the fire.

The "indolent reviewer," it is possible, may not appreciate this ironic treatment of his craft, but no one will question the interest attaching to Black's description of the processes through which a novel must pass before it is given to the public.

In writing to the younger members of his own family, Black delighted in keeping up a jocular tone, as in the following note to his niece, Miss Morten:

To Miss Morten.

REFORM CLUB,

Thursday.

MY DEAR DOLL,—Are you coming up to see us before you go abroad? I should like to tell you how you are to take care of the poor things who are going with you. Just in case you can't come to London, here are a few things you ought to remember in travelling. You must be sure whatever custom-house officers, station-masters, or policemen may do to you, never to strike them. It's no use. They have the law on their side, and in Italy they put thumb-screws on you. If the man is small, you might shove him over the edge of the platform just as a train was coming up; but in ordinary circumstances the most you should do is to threaten to write to the *Times*. If you say "*Teems*" they will understand you. Never offer a cigar to a stranger till you find out he is not English. He might be English, and discover the cigar was bad, and be angry. A foreigner would not. You can easily find out the nationality of a stranger by addressing a few questions to him. If you think he is Spanish, say "Como esta, Luié?" to him; if Italian, "Datemi una bottiglia de vino ordinario"; if French, "Allez-vous ong, does your mother know you're out?" if German, "Hé, Vaterland? Rhein wein. Who stole the clock?" By these means you will make yourself agreeable to your fellow-travellers, who will probably pay for your brandy and soda at the next station. But I would recommend you seltzer water rather than soda with foreign brandy. You must always put out your cigar before going into a cathedral. Throwing bedroom furniture out of the window of your hotel is forbidden in France, but not so in Italy. If you happen to be in a theatre in some parts of south Germany you will find that foreigners are not allowed to hit the actresses with oranges; that privilege is confined to the natives.

Nor should you on any occasion fling a lemonade-bottle at an actor. You can send the present to his private address. Bearing these counsels well in mind, you will get through your journey in comparative quiet. You can let out your pent-up spirits when you return to England.

Your affectionate uncle,

WILLIAM BLACK.

It has already been stated that when Black removed from London to Brighton he had three children—Mabel, Norman, and Violet. It does not lie within the scope of this brief memoir to enter into the details of his domestic life, but something may be said here of the devoted love which he bore for those of his own household. At Paston House he was not merely the husband and the father, but the hero and the friend, the very light upon the hearthstone. He had always found pleasure in making other people happy, and there are hundreds who can bear testimony to the generous amplitude of his hospitality. But, above and before anything else, it was his wish to bring the joy of his life into his own family circle. There were no lines of Burns's which he admired more truly than those in which the poet has explained wherein consists "the true pathos and sublime of human life." Black's wife was something more than the daily companion and fireside friend. She was not only the cherished confidante to whom he told everything with regard to his own affairs, but the critic to whom he submitted everything that he wrote as it came fresh from his brain, and to whose judgment he was always ready to submit. Every day,

when he had finished his task of writing, he brought the few closely written pages that represented the day's work to the drawing-room, and placed them in his wife's hands. He would sit silent and almost nervous until she had read what he had written, and then receive her words of sympathy and encouragement with a sigh of relief and satisfaction. From first to last, no jarring chord was ever struck in the intercourse between husband and wife; and it is right that the world should know that his domestic happiness was absolutely without alloy. For him, at least, there was nothing real in the threadbare sneer at the wives of men of genius.

As for the children, amid all his other engagements the father delighted in them to an extent to which words can do but scanty justice. He had a real love for all children, and was singularly fond of playing with them and teasing them in the fashion in which childhood delights. But it was for his own children, naturally enough, that he had the tenderest heart, the fullest sympathy. On the days when he was not absorbed in work he delighted to share in their games, inventing special pastimes for their amusement, or making them accompany him in his walks and entertaining them with the unreserved talk of a man who is not afraid to make his heart known to a child. When *White Wings* appeared, it was prefaced by one of his rare dedications, which ran as follows: "To our Queen Mabs, in memory of her first cruise on board any yacht, this record of our long summer idleness in 1878 is most respectfully dedicated by her obliged

and humble servant, the author." Something of the atmosphere of the home at Paston House may be caught from these words. It was a home in which a peculiar intimacy prevailed between the head and the other inmates. The children were always encouraged, even when very young, to speak their thoughts freely to their parents, and Black would take as much pains in explaining or discussing any question that might be raised by one of his young daughters, not yet come to her teens, as if he were dealing with one of his wisest and most valued friends. As they grew up, he made it his business to instruct them in those healthy sports of which he was himself so fond. His yearly autumn holidays were always spent with his wife and them. More than once he took them for long cruises in the Mediterranean, and at such times the well-known novelist and man of letters retired into the background. His young daughters played the most prominent part among the ship's company—to the father's unfeigned delight. It had long been his habit to write every day to his wife when he was from home, and presently he treated any child who was absent in the same way. Day by day they received a brief note in which the news of the hour was told, and every note breathed unobtrusively the spirit of a father's love. It was a rule in the family that all letters passing between its members should be destroyed, and for this reason I am only able to print one specimen of a letter from Black to one of his children. Although it is hardly in chronological order, I shall print it here,

at the close of this brief reference to a side of Black's life with which the public has no concern, but some mention of which was necessary to a full understanding of his character:

To Miss Mable Black.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
December 12th.

MY DEAREST MABS,—We are all delighted to hear of your junketings. In this remote corner of the earth there is nothing going on but gales—and not well-dressed gales either. I am just finishing up the history of the creature called Wild Eelin—and omelettes are not made without breaking of eggs, as you may have heard. The refrain is:

"Loud winds, low winds, to every maid her lover;
Where'er the sunlight shines, where'er the shadows hover;
But my dear love, my one love, comes never back to me,
Nor by the shore, nor by the hills, nor by the Northern sea."

She bursts out crying while she sings this pathetic ditty, and then she goes and marries the other fellow.

In haste to catch the Sunday post. Remember, all news is welcome. My love to Chiggie, who is so kindly in sending us post-cards.

Your affectionate
PAPA.

Chiggie was the pet name of the lady who was the governess of Black's children in their youth, and their friend and companion in after-life.

It was in 1883 that Black made the acquaintance of Miss Mary Anderson, the American actress. Very

soon he and Mrs. Black found that they had met with a congenial spirit, and the friendship between them and Miss Anderson became warm and intimate. At Paston House Miss Anderson became a frequent guest, the whole family—children included—treating her as a member of the household. She visited them more than once during their summer residences in the Highlands, and a constant correspondence between her and Mr. and Mrs. Black was maintained. This friendship, which was continued unbroken to the time of Black's last illness, brought him into contact with another side of life—that of the stage—and furnished him with new scenes and ideals, which in course of time were duly incorporated in his stories. It need hardly be said that Miss Anderson's American birth tended to increase rather than to lessen Black's interest in his wide circle of American friends. It was through Mr. E. A. Abbey that Black was first introduced to Miss Anderson. She saw him in the light in which he was usually seen by strangers—that of a silent, retiring, but quietly observant man. Like others, she discovered that it was not altogether easy to become acquainted with the real man, but, when she did so at last, she found how much of the nature of a boy he still retained, and how, in his moments of leisure and relaxation, his Celtic exuberance of spirits asserted itself. She was quickly drawn into the current of the innocent home-life at Paston House, and, more fully than most persons, she was permitted to share in the bright diversions, sometimes carried to extreme lengths, in which Black was wont to

find relief from the pressure of his work as an imaginative writer. As Miss Anderson has kindly furnished me with some reminiscences of her friendship with Black which throw light upon this side of his character, I shall venture to draw upon them here. At Paston House his favorite game was "dumb crambo," and there was no limit to the extravagant enthusiasm with which he played it. If, when he was at work, he was the severe, absorbed, silent man whom everybody knew, when he was at play he became a thorough boy, and found his chief pleasure in the companionship of those who, like himself, could cast aside the cares of life, and indulge in unrestrained, though harmless, merriment. At such times he was very fond of practical jokes, carefully confining them, however, to those whose equanimity he knew would not be disturbed by them. On one occasion, when he and Mrs. Black were to sup with Miss Anderson in her room at the Lyceum, he got access beforehand to the supper-room, famous as the meeting-place of the old Beefsteak Club, and pasted over the labels of the champagne bottles a paper bearing in large letters the one word "Poison." It happened, rather unfortunately on this occasion, that, unknown to Black, Miss Anderson was entertaining a number of guests with whom she was but slightly acquainted, so that the joke turned out to be somewhat embarrassing. It must have given the strangers who knew Black only by repute something of a shock to discover how very human and how very boyish he was under his cold outward demeanor.

It was in the Buckingham Street rooms, where Black's friends passed so many happy hours, that another mad prank was played which might have had unpleasant consequences. He and Mrs. Black were entertaining a large number of intimate friends to dinner, including Miss Anderson, Pettie, Colin Hunter, E. A. Abbey, and others. After dinner Black expressed a great desire to have some singing —for he never lost his love for music, and for German songs in particular, especially those accompanied by a lusty chorus. Unfortunately, there was no piano in his rooms. He had changed shortly before from one set of chambers on the top floor in Buckingham Street to the adjoining set, and it occurred to him that he had heard his successor in the old rooms, whose acquaintance he had not yet made, playing the piano. It happened that one of the party knew this gentleman, and took upon himself to declare that he would be only too glad, if he were at home, to place his room at the disposal of Black and his guests. He was absent, as it happened; but this fact, according to his friend, made no difference. Relying upon this assurance, the whole company trooped into the vacant room, and quickly filled it with their songs and choruses. In the middle of their merriment the owner of the chamber returned unexpectedly, and seemed to be almost as much stupefied by the spectacle which presented itself to his astonished eyes as the intruders were by his appearance. His friend, who had lured the others into the room, was so convulsed with laughter that he could not speak. For a moment Black was dumb,

but when he had recovered from the shock he saluted his neighbor as cordially as though he had known him for years, and proceeded solemnly to introduce his guests to him. "This is Miss Mary Anderson; this is Mr. Pettie, the Royal Academician," and so on. No doubt the young gentleman was a little staggered when he found what manner of guests they were that he was unwittingly entertaining. Then Black, having recovered his self-possession, frankly explained the liberty that he had taken, and apologized for it. Fortunately, Black's neighbor was a good-natured man. He not only accepted the apology most graciously, but declared that he felt honored by being allowed to receive such visitors in his room. Peace was restored, and the whole party spent the rest of the evening together in music and harmony.

Under Miss Anderson's auspices Black made two appearances upon the stage, both of which were amusing, though in different ways. His first attempt to tread the boards was made, as it happened, in his native city of Glasgow, while he and Mrs. Black were spending a week with Miss Anderson as her guests. It was during this time that the revelry to which they had become accustomed in their lighter hours ran highest. Miss Anderson received from Black the title of "That Beautiful Wretch," appropriated from one of his own books, while he became known in the little party as "The D. D. B. V.," otherwise "The Double-Dyed Black Villain." Chaff of the most unmerciful kind formed the staple of the talk, and for some days the mem-

bers of the party engaged in a keen competition for the purpose of determining who could invent or tell the most outrageously extravagant story. Black, as might have been expected from his occupation, was the winner, and a tiny tin kettle, in not obscure allusion to the well-known story of the bishop, was the prize. Black wore the tin kettle with pride, but later on Miss Anderson substituted for it one of gold, with the inscription, "To the D.D.B.V., from the Wretch." In after-years Black delighted to exhibit the kettle to his friends, and to excite their curiosity with regard to the meaning of the mysterious inscription.

It was during this merry week of high spirits and enjoyment that Black made his appearance on the stage as a "super"—or "thinker," in the theatrical phrase—in the famous ballroom scene in "Romeo and Juliet." He went on in a blue domino and mask. According to Miss Anderson, no more ignominious first appearance was ever made. Before the curtain was raised Black planted himself in a rather prominent position on the stage, with his back to a pillar. Here he remained absolutely motionless and silent, making no attempt to play his humble part as one of the giddy throng—a veritable death's-head at the feast. Miss Anderson and others tried to talk to him, but he was incapable of answering, being absolutely speechless from stage-fright. Presently the revellers departed, leaving the stage free for the meeting of Romeo and Juliet. To Miss Anderson's horror, Black stuck to his post, or, rather, to his pillar, thus stopping the progress

of the piece in the eyes of a crowded house. The fair Juliet walked across to him and said imperatively, "Go off." There was no response. He had no more the use of his legs than of his tongue. Fortunately, the situation was grasped by Miss Anderson's brother, who played the part of Tybalt, and he and a fellow-actor, returning to the stage, succeeded by sheer force in dragging the paralyzed super from it. This true tale I should not have ventured to tell if I had not been able to supplement it by the equally true account of Black's second appearance as an actor. This took place a year or two later at Dublin, where Miss Anderson was acting. Here again Mr. and Mrs. Black were the guests of the famous actress, and the old jokes and laughter and chaff of Glasgow were revived. Needless to say, Black had to submit to not a few merciless allusions to the part he had played in "Romeo and Juliet." He vowed that they should see that he was not unequal to the task of taking a "thinker's" part upon the stage. Miss Anderson was playing in "The Winter's Tale," and Black insisted upon assuming the part of one of the supers, who was dressed as a very old man, with a venerable beard, and locks that fell upon his shoulders. A portrait of Black in this character has been preserved, and it is impossible to recognize in the photograph the well-known, clear-cut features of the original. When Black went upon the stage in this disguise, it was evident to his friends that he had recovered only too completely from the paralysis of stage-fright. His nervousness now manifested itself in excessive motion and

activity. He walked about among his fellow-thinkers with unceasing restlessness, and, judging by the wild motions of his arms, seemed to be addressing to each in turn an impassioned harangue. The audience began to wonder who the new actor was, and what on earth he was doing in a play in which neither Shakespeare nor the stage-managers, who had incurred the risk of disaster by their devotion to the legitimate drama, ever intended him to appear. Presently came the time when it was the business of Perdita to distribute flowers among the peasants, among whom Black had his place. Miss Anderson, carrying on the practical jokes of the family circle, had prepared a surprise for this moment, and having distributed flowers among the less-favored "thinkers," she handed to Black a large cake, crowned with a wreath of laurel, saying as she did so, "You take it," in allusion to his triumphs in the contest of wits at the supper-table. To her consternation, Black showed that he was quite prepared to carry out the jest, for, taking the cake from the hands of Perdita, he immediately distributed it in substantial portions to his hungry fellow-thinkers, who, finding it to be of excellent quality, began to munch it greedily under the eyes of the house. This was Black's last appearance upon the stage, and to his friends there is something intensely characteristic of the man in the contrast between his two performances.

I have said enough to indicate Black's attitude towards the famous actress. Each was *bon garçon* to the other, and Black greatly relished his en-

counters of wit and fun with one whose talents were so distinctly above the average, and who shared so largely in the boyish temperament of his lighter moods. Having stated the character of the friendship which united Miss Anderson to the family at Paston House, I venture to print some of Black's letters to the lady, without any particular regard to their chronological order. Chronological order, indeed, is out of the question, owing to Black's incurable propensity for leaving his letters undated.

To Miss Anderson.

ALTNAHARRA, N. B.,
January 16, 1884.

DEAR MISS ANDERSON,—Along with this there should reach you a Scotch salmon, the only creature of its kind likely to be in London at the same moment. I think Mr. Abbey and myself should apologize to you for sending such a thing, for young ladies' presents should be pretty and nice, such as scent-baskets, bouquets, volumes of poetry, and the like; but the fact is that this finny and scaly animal is somewhat remarkable, as it is the first that has been caught in any Scotch loch this year, and also it is the first salmon Mr. Abbey has caught anywhere.

Accordingly there is much rejoicing in the inn among the gillies and keepers, etc., etc., and if Mr. Abbey doesn't show them how to do the cake-walk to-morrow evening, when they are going to have a small and early dance, it will be a most ungenerous return for all their sympathy and congratulations. But why should I bother you, amid all your arduous and delightful labors, with the experiences of two maniacs who have adventured into the north Highlands in midwinter? I hope the actual presence of the salmon will convince you, at least, that we don't tell lies;

and with kindest regards (in which Mr. Abbey would, no doubt, be most glad to join only that he is half asleep in a novel before a peat-fire),

Believe me,

Yours very faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

ALTNAHARRA,

March 18th.

MY DEAR MISS ANDERSON,—I send you a small (family consumption) salmon, that should reach you just about the same time as you get this. But do you think that I am going to send you the long letter I promised you, explaining why you should follow the advice I gave you? No, I won't. I withdraw that advice altogether, even at the cost of the world's losing the poet who would be created by your jilting him. And the reason is that you might go too far and spoil the whole thing. In short, you might not jilt him. That would be fatal. After all, what is the use of experiments? You ought to be fairly well content as you are. Suppose the fairy godmother to say: "You shall at one and the same time be young, beautiful, and famous, in good health and spirits, have a head too cool to let you be spoiled by flattery; and before you an endless possibility of successes in an art of which you are passionately fond." Should the human being ask for more? There was once a Scotch weaver whose wife said to him: "You were drunk on Monday night, you were drunk on Tuesday and Wednesday nights, and now you are drunk again. Four nights in the week drunk, and still you're grumbling. What more would you like? Would you like to be an angel?" So don't you make any experiments in the way of acquiring remorse, and let the uncreated poet go. I will send you a sketch tour for Scotland as soon as I can get a map to mark with red ink; but as

regards Italy, you won't need any such thing. Take as much time as you can in Venice; don't eat oysters at Naples; wrap up well if you go to the Coliseum at night, and don't drink water in hotels anywhere. These precepts, dearly beloved brethren — but I am forgetting altogether, and it's eight o'clock in the morning, and they're howling at me to come away and pursue more salmon.

Kind regards to all your home circle, from

Yours very faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

ALTNAHARRA,

March 23d.

DEAR MISS ANDERSON,—I am exceedingly sorry to hear you have been ailing; but it is scarcely to be wondered at, seeing that you are in two pieces every night, and one of them with such a concentrated tear and wear as Clarisse. However, you will soon get free, and the quiet of a gondola in Venice—on a moonlight night—will do more good to your brain than any Scotch salmon. By-the-way, go to Danieli's hotel. There is a little Desdemona about at times; but so there is everywhere, and it is not half as bad at Danieli's as at the —— Hotel, where the hapless young person is said to have been buried. Alas and alack! I'm afraid I can't come to your supper-party, for I am, in a measure, host here, and couldn't well leave the poor creatures who have ventured into Sutherlandshire in the winter. But I hope you'll have a *real good time*, and if somebody doesn't propose your health, why then—then—then—but I mustn't use strong language. They've gone and burned Paston House—at least, they've burned the roof off. It was a shabby trick to play the moment I had turned my back; but, fortunately, my wife and the bairns were with my sister in Surrey, and escaped the fright. And if anybody thinks that any such two-

penny-halfpenny conflagration is going to draw me away from salmon-fishing, he doesn't in the least know what kind of a hairpin I am. They can go on burning if they like.

Yours very faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

PASTON HOUSE,

November 16th.

DEAR WRETCH,—It's little you deserve that I should be writing to you at this minute; for not one scrap of your pen have I received since the month of August last. However, you always were a wretch, and you always will be, and you can't help it; and, besides, my wife asks me to explain to you why she can't write to you just now. She is a prisoner with Mabs and Norman, amusing themselves with a dose of scarlatina; but they are going on all right, and after the proper period of probation she will be restored to her liberty again (as much of it as we have got in this wretched old country). I wonder how it is that the correspondence of American young ladies always goes astray. Miss —— was down here a little while ago. She wrote to us suggesting a meeting. Of course, my wife couldn't go; and I was too timid and shy to brave the interview by myself, and so I sent her a note saying that there was illness in the house, which note I sent to the address she gave me. Ten days thereafter it was returned through the dead-letter office; and though I subsequently got it forwarded through a friend, during that time she must have considered us guilty of the discourtesy of not even answering her invitation. You're a queer lot of people, you are. Mr. Pettie writes me this morning that he sent a photograph to Joe [Miss Anderson's brother] to the address that *he* gave and that *that* was returned, as he had gone away. I have now asked him to send it to the Clarendon Hotel, New York; but by the time it gets there it will be "gone away" again. . . .

THE D. D. B. V.

To the same.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON.

DEARLY-BELOVED PUPIL,—I will now resume my little lecture to you on that interesting subject, the weather. To-day we have just about as much weather as we had yesterday; and usually there is about the same quantity. The weather may be either good or bad; when it is wretched, strange to say, it calls forth no commiseration; nay, its extreme wretchedness provokes hatred rather than sympathy. Marcus Aurelius has remarked that those persons are best guarded against the weather who have paid their debts, especially their debts of honor. In very bad weather the gloves I usually wear are seven and a half in size, of a delicate saffron hue, with three bands in black or gold on the back. With such gloves you are tolerably proof against any climate; but should the weather affect your sciatic nerve, then you should take a little trip, the best line being the Massageries Impériales. The weather around the pole is extremely frigid; so cold, indeed, that you can hardly polar-bear it; but it is sultry in the neighborhood of Edinburgh, especially about the beginning of May, when the warmth will even cause you to see things as through a faintly crimson atmosphere (this was observed by Sigismondus Tellurius, in the year 1183). In weather which is neither hot nor cold, a pair of gloves will sometimes have a salutary effect upon the eyes. In no kind of weather whatever should you bet about Van der Weyde's electric light; this is one of the axioms of Confucius, who perceived the wisdom of it at an early age. There is no more at present, my interesting and innocent young pupil, to tell you about the weather. . . . THE D. D. B. V.

To Wemyss Reid.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
October 6, 1885.

MY DEAR REID,—I must write and thank you for your great kindness to Mary Anderson and her brother. . . .

We had a high old time in Glasgow, as M. A.'s guests. I went on the stage one night in a blue domino, Lady Capulet's ball; and the fair Lady Juliet came along and talked to the humble super in the background; yea, and made merry with him when the Capulets and Montagues were squabbling among themselves. We had some gay evenings at the Central Station Hotel. When are you coming up to town? The Reformers are back in their own "howf" again.

Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

The following letter to Mr. Joseph Anderson shows that Black was still the victim of the imaginative journalists who had pursued him so relentlessly in the days of his early popularity:

To Joseph Anderson.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
February 26, 1886.

DEAR JOE,—I enclose for your edification an interesting specimen of journalism which somebody sends me from the *Detroit Free Press*. I haven't counted the sentences, but each one contains a—(whish!). I never saw this man; never was at any ball in the island of Lewis; never was a reporter for the *Manchester Guardian*, or for anything else; never saw the adorable Miss Mackenzie, nor even heard of such a person's existence. The forty-pound salmon shrinks into insignificance beside this. . . . I had a letter this morning from the wife of an editor in St. Louis, asking me (*apropos* of nothing) to send her a bit of one of my neckties. Is this a common form of keepsake in America? If it is, it is very curious, for it is the survival of a very, very old Scotch custom.

"O, dinna ye mind, love Gregory,
When we sate at the wine,
How we changed the napkins frae our necks?
It's no sae lang sin syne."

Let me know how you are all getting on.

Yours ever,
WILLIAM BLACK.

The story from the Detroit newspaper, to which Black gave so emphatic a contradiction, was as follows:

There died in New York last week one of the hard-working toilers of the press, whose life was probably as full of strange incidents as any novelist could have made it. His name was John Campbell, and if any writer of fiction desires material for a startling novel he should follow Campbell's life, and become a "headquarters" reporter for a New York paper. It may be of interest to know that to this humble reporter on a daily newspaper the public is in part indebted for William Black's charming novel, *A Princess of Thule*. Campbell was by birth a Manxman. "I was spending some time on the isle of Lewis," he said in conversation once, "and Black, who was then a reporter on the *Manchester Guardian*, had been putting in some time at the same place. I had been thrown in his company a great deal, and we got to know each other pretty well. Suddenly, towards the end of the week, Black told me he was going home, and in order to induce him to stay I told him that there was going to be a ball at the principal inn in the town on Saturday night, and that if he wanted to learn something of the character of Lewis people he ought to stay and see it. He did so. There was a great gathering of young people, but the innkeeper's daughter, Miss Mackenzie, was the prettiest

of them all. Black met her, and became very much attached to her. The island seemed to obtain a new interest in his mind, and he remained for several days. He preserved in his book Miss Mackenzie as Sheila, the Princess of Thule, and her father as the old King of Lewis. I am glad to say that they are faithful representations of two very charming people."

It is to be hoped that Mr. John Campbell, the headquarters reporter of New York, was not really responsible for this farrago of falsehood. The reader already knows how Black went to the island of Lewis for the special purpose of studying the scenery in which he proposed to lay the opening chapters of a story the heroine of which he had already realized in his own mind before ever he landed on the island. It was annoying to him to be tracked by these persistent and ridiculous inventions about innkeepers and their pretty daughters; but he must, I think, have found some consolation under the persecution in the thought that these determined attempts to discover originals for the ever-delightful Princess furnished in themselves strong proof of the fascination which she exercised over the minds of readers in all parts of the world.

Mr. Bret Harte to William Black.

GLASGOW,

March 15, 1885.

MY DEAR BLACK,—I was in the far south, trying to get rid of an obstinate cold, when your note reached me, and haven't been in London for some time. I expected you to drop in here on your way up "to Balnagownie's arms"—whoever she may be. I'm afraid I don't want any

" Ardgay " in mine, thank you. Why any man in this damp climate should want to make himself wetter by salmon-fishing passes my comprehension. Is there no drier spot to be had in all Great Britain? I shudder at the name of a river, and shiver at the sight of any fish that isn't dried. I hear, too, that you are in the habit of making poetry on these occasions, and that you are dropping lines all over the place. How far is that place—anyway? I shall be in Glasgow until the end of March, and if you'll dry yourself thoroughly and come in and dine with me at that time, I'll show you how " the laboring poor " of Glasgow live.

Yours always,

BRET HARTE.

It was in 1885, when on his way to Scotland to spend the summer at Oban, that the idea occurred to Black of reviving the scheme of *The Phaeton* by writing a tale dealing with the *Strange Adventures* of a party of friends embarked on a house-boat. It was the sight of the canal-boats on the London and Liverpool Canal, which he saw from the windows of the express train as he was carried northward, that put the idea into his mind. His wife remembers how, after sitting for a long time in silence, he told her of the new scheme which he had conceived. The house-boat journey was a real one; but, as in the case of the *Strange Adventures of a Phaeton*, the company which actually made the expedition was not that described in the pages of the story. Black's companions were Mr. Alfred Parsons and his American friend Mr. Bowker. In the novel, the old familiar figures of Queen Tita and her husband reappear, and there is no doubt that

the original of the heroine—altered and idealized, according to his wont—was Miss Anderson.

Mr. Bowker has favored me with some account of this inland voyage:

"It was my own good fortune," he says, "to be Black's companion in the journey which furnished material for *The Strange Adventures of a House-boat*, in May and June, 1886. Our craft was not the white vision of the story, but a very modest house-boat, which, after much searching like that of Jack Dunscombe, Black had bought from a nautical seedsman who had built on the hull of an old whale-boat, twenty-one feet long, the upper works of a house-boat. The craft was not 'a nameless barge,' but a barge of many names, for on her bow the name *Daisy* was painted; the life-preservers for use on the raging canal bore the name *Waterfly*; we called her *The Waterbug*, and the jeering populace of the tow-path dubbed her *Noah's Ark*. The little cabin, about fifteen feet by six, was, however, much as Black described it in the story, with its red Utrecht velvet cushions, its sconces, and its hurricane-deck overhead, our joy and delight in fine weather, except when the exigencies of 'low bridge' required us to go below. This cabin roof was partly supported by an upright post, on which there shifted up and down a circular affair which served as a dining-table by day and as a part of our bunks by night. It could be got out of the way altogether by hitching it aloft. Our real start was from Stratford-on-Avon. Abbey and Millet had come over from their favorite Broadway to see us off, and there was a scene of wild hilarity, not surpassed by any of the doings on the house-boat of fiction. The first night out we moored in the forest of Arden, as described in the book, and it took most of the evening, I remember, to discover or invent a method by which the dining-table, the red Utrecht velvet

cushions, and other appurtenances could be combined into beds which did not within two minutes dump us upon the floor. Most of the incidents described in the book—the weird haul through the tunnel, the looking down-hill, the start in the wonderful dawn from Sharpness Basin, the risky passage down the chutes of the Severn, the adventure with the three pirates of Bristol town, and the episode near Devizes, where we came near to drowning Alfred Parsons and his two sisters, who had come to meet us, like Jack Dunscombe's friends—were literally true; but there was no shade of resemblance in the *dramatis personae*. The young American heroine was, indeed, a reminiscence in some respects of the charming qualities shown in her private life by 'The Rose of Kentucky,' who was so great a favorite in the Brighton house, and after whom we had agreed the boat was to be named in fiction; but Miss Anderson never saw the craft until years afterwards, when Black had given it to Alfred Parsons, and it found a resting-place on the quiet waters of the Avon, not far from Broadway.

"One of the most amusing experiences of that journey was not told in the book. As we neared Gloucester, our skipper had a violent war of words with a not very gentlemanly owner of a steam-launch which nearly ran us down. As we were spending that evening in a cosey corner of the inn at Gloucester there appeared a person who, addressing both of us, introduced himself as a warm admirer of 'the great Scotch novelist,' and with profuse apologies declared that he never would have acted as he had done—for he was the owner of the launch—if he had known who was in the boat. Black and I remained mischievously noncommittal as to who was who until our embarrassed friend wound up one of his apologies with the appeal, 'Whichever of you *is* Mr. Black?' Among my literary treasures is a copy of the *House-boat* volume, with the inscription, 'To the best of crews, from the worst of captains'; for

it was part of my duty to work the lochs and steer the boat, until Black insisted that I would ruin his landscapes by colliding with the tow-path or anything that came handy. The real crew consisted of a skipper, a small cabin-boy, and a tall horse-marine, who managed the venerable quadruped known in real life as 'Whiskers,' because of his hirsute appendages. Black kept a tiny note-book, an inch and a half square, in his pocket, in which he jotted down impressions and incidents, while I gave the unromantic truth in my letters home. It was agreed between us that he was to publish the fiction and I the fact, but afterwards he humorously objected that too much truth might 'destroy many a cherished illusion about the imaginary folk.'"

In one of his letters he wrote Mr. Bowker as follows: "My literary method, as far as describing these out-door things goes, is to represent them as vividly as I can, partly because I think that lends an additional reality to the fictitious personages, but chiefly because I like it, and choose to do my book in my own way; and if any critic tells me that I describe too much scenery, I tell him that is my business and not his. There is another thing. If ever I live to be old and senile, I shall be able to recall all the beautiful things I have seen, because I have stuck them all into these books of mine."

In another letter he said, speaking of the literary aspirants who like to get some notion of the ways of working of different writers: "With regard to myself, I would not have them imagine that I either practise or recommend a description of scenery as scenery—that is, trying to do in literature what the landscape-painter does in art. What I try to do is

to get at the very things the painter cannot reach at all—the singing of birds, the scent of hedges, the blowing of the wind, a changing of light, anything, indeed, that will give a sense of space and atmosphere and color and light as surrounding my characters. Of course, in such a book as *The Adventures of a Phaeton* there is some attention paid to passing detail; but that is an exception, and I wouldn't have these innocent young folk encouraged to attempt to describe scenery as a separate branch of literary art. For myself, I don't care much for orthodox scenery. What I care for are effects of light and color (which you get more beautifully in the west Highlands than in any other place I know), and I would sooner see a rose-red sunrise along a bit of icicled road than all the Swiss landscapes I ever beheld."

Before the *Adventures of a House-boat* was actually written, two other novels — *Sabina Zembra* and *In Far Lochaber*—were published, in 1887 and 1888. The former dealt in a realistic fashion with the passing craze of society for East End slumming. The following letter has reference to *Sabina Zembra:*

To Norman Lockyer.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
Sunday Morning (1886).

MY DEAR LOCKYER,—Will you please say to Miss —— how sorry I am. The house is full of people, and I can't get up. She evidently misapprehends my purpose. I know a great deal more of the East End than she can

possibly know, having been through the whole business—crimps, lodging-houses, penny-gaffs, and the saloons of Ratcliff Highway, under the guidance of people who have lived there all their lives. And I don't want to write a story about London slums (though my last was about the London docks), nor yet to write sentimental ballads for the *Referee*. No, sir! What I want is to go some night to hear some young lady or other address a Whitechapel audience, to see whether that looks a promising substitute for marriage, in a country where marriage is becoming more and more an obsolete institution. In great haste,

Yours always,

WILLIAM BLACK.

Sabina Zembra was published simultaneously in a number of English newspapers in 1887.

To Miss Anderson.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,

Saturday Morning.

DEAR WRETCH,—It's quite nice to see your handwriting once again. I thought you had forgotten all about us. But, please, it's not me that's ill; it's Mustrez Blahck, who has been these last few days in London in the doctor's hands. She comes down again to-day. *I* have only had a touch of what everybody has been having, an inflammation of the nerves that got hold of Parsons by the cheek, and Du Maurier by the fingers, and me by the fingers and toes. But, all the same, you should have seen this interesting invalid fishing for salmon in a snow-storm. Now I am taking things easy, getting heaps of work done, and occasionally crawling out to a morning performance or a small dinner-party. . . . Have you had time yet to read the first few chapters of *Sabina Zembra?* I had a note the other day from ——, in which he said that people

were saying that the "S. Z." of these opening chapters was very like you. But what *won't* they say? Old Mrs. Proctor wrote to B——, telling him how accurately he was described in the same book as the artist hero. Now the artist hero is a young Scotch landscape-painter of twenty-eight, exceedingly handsome, black-eyed, a skilful musician, etc., etc. Is that like B——? I don't think even K—— would say so. I saw two beautiful portraits of a young lady the other day in the character of Rosalind. I would have gone into the shop and bought them, but that the young lady herself had conjured me not to do so, saying that she would send me them. I would write and remind her of her promise if only I could remember her name —but I am getting old—my memory isn't what it was— dear, dear, what's to become of us all? Never mind, I still recollect that I am

Yours most sincerely,
THE D. D. B. V.

This sportive letter is the first direct intimation that we have from Black of his sufferings from that errant tormentor, the vagus nerve. It caused him great pain at this time; and though he struggled bravely, he was even now, though he lived for more than ten years longer, unmistakably on the down-grade so far as his physical and nervous condition was concerned. He was reticent now, as he had been all his life, and few of his friends knew what he suffered. If at times they noticed an unwonted depression in his appearance and manner they were reassured by some wild outburst of high spirits, or by the knowledge that in his working hours he was just as much absorbed in his task, and as merciless to himself in its performance, as he had ever been.

Those who knew and loved him think sadly now of those days when they were kept in ignorance of the positive physical torment that he had to suffer, and when they were only permitted to guess at its existence from the nervous depression with which he manifestly had to contend.

To Dr. Lauder Brunton.

REFORM CLUB,
April 3d.

MY DEAR BRUNTON,—Thank you very much for the diagram. I knew it was that infernal vagus nerve. What the devil has it to do in that galley? And it kicked up another row yesterday morning, when I saw a young ruffian nearly killed by a train; the thing seemed to spring a mine down below, and the shock, curiously enough, passed out *by the tongue*, where it tasted like fire, if fire has a taste. There is another fact for you. I know so little German, and so little about the history of evil, that I dare not review that book. I thought some one was mentioned on Saturday who could review it, and I was to have a look at it afterwards. Alas! alas! I have had my book; and have too soon discovered that I have entirely or nearly forgotten what little German I ever had. I will return you the book in a day or two.

Yours ever,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

REFORM CLUB,
Friday.

MY DEAR BRUNTON,—Just a word of acknowledgment of your kindness in securing for me the services of the Swedish magician, whose spells are already proving efficacious. He seems to think that he will have quite finished by Wednesday next week, in which case, I suppose,

to save you trouble, I may simply ask him what his fee is, and pay him forthwith. I owe you a profound apology about Ferrier; if I had known that I was to be left in a consulting-room by myself, I could have got over that small financial difficulty without any trouble. As matters stand, if you could get him to accept a fee it would be very much better; but I would not press so small a matter; but would it do if I sent Mrs. Ferrier a copy of *Judith Shakespeare* bound in white vellum, or Ferrier himself a salmon (supposing I got one), or both? Du Maurier seems to have got this same ailment in his hands and feet (though in his case they call it peripheral neuralgia), and as I am to meet him at dinner to-night, I presume there will be an interesting comparison of symptoms. But *there won't be no symptoms* when I get up to the Oykel.

Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To Miss Anderson.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,

Christmas Day, 1885.

DEAR WRETCH,—You may imagine that there was joy in this house of Black yesterday. First of all, the small sprat, Violet, was allowed to come back to her own home after the long separation. And then came your beautiful presents to tell us all that in your busy life, and three thousand miles away, you still could find time to think of some people who haven't forgotten you. Oh no, they haven't, not the least bit. It isn't a way of theirs. Besides, there are all kinds of things to remind them—to say nothing of the five hundred portraits, busts, statuettes, etc., etc., of you that are all over the house. Every time I see a woman in the street wearing a red veil (to give herself a nice scarlet-feverish aspect), I say to myself, "I wonder if that Wretch is keeping her promise." Then there was another thing. For six or seven weeks I occupied the

Blue Room that you know—Juliet's chamber, we call it —and each morning I found I could not pour water from the ewer into the basin without shying about a quart of it over the floor. Accordingly, every morning it was, "Now, how on earth did *she* manage it?" Bret Harte, who also had this room, used to complain that he had to keep chasing the soap for about twenty minutes round the washstand; so it is clear there must be some kind of *diablerie* in that apartment. I believe you tried to pitch yourself out of the window, then repented, and pretended that your foot slipped. I don't think I have written to you since I got the Van der Weyde photographs. The one in which you are seated (the Tam o' Shanter one) is greatly admired—and coveted. Parsons, whose new studio is very swell, though he has timorously painted it white, is so delighted with it that he is going to have it let into the central panel of his mantel-piece. I gave one to Mrs. H., whose letter I enclose, and one to Georgie (did I tell you about K——'s black eye?—it sounds so poetical!). Abbey wants one—not a black eye, a photograph; but I haven't one to spare until Van der Weyde sends me two or three more. . . . Mrs. Chart had the "Private Secretary" down here a little while ago. We went along and had afternoon dinner with her, and then went to her box. My wife and she kept informing me that *this* time I should see the piece. I really don't know what they meant; but as it seemed to afford their innocent young minds some amusement, I suppose it was all right. I *did* see the piece. What then? There's nothing I hate so much as envious ribaldry. . . .

THE D. D. B. V.

To the same.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,

November 23d.

DEAR WRETCH,—You were so very nice and good the other evening that I can't help sending you a line just to

free your innocent young mind from certain apprehensions. Know, then, that the heroine of the house-boat story is represented as being the most delightful and angelic of human creatures—beautiful, gentle, fascinating, merry, generous, good-humored; in short, everything that is most winning and attractive and admirable; so you will see at once that nobody could for a moment dream of identifying such a fictitious character with—with—with—with—in fact, anybody! Now are you happy? Good-bye, and be just as nice the next time.

THE D. D. B. V.

To Mr. Crerar.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
December 4, 1885.

MY DEAR CRERAR,—The daintily got-up little volume just received. I think the poem exceedingly fitted to the occasion, and very sympathetic. My good friend, don't trouble yourself about anything you see concerning me in print. *That* story isn't likely to give me a sleepless night—no, not if they were to kill me in newspaper paragraphs once a fortnight. For the rest, I haven't read a single review of any book of mine for years back (though I have read two leading articles). I know my own business. Two of the children are just escaping from a mild attack of scarlatina. It has been a great annoyance, for we have been unable to see any friends for the last five weeks—and this is the gay time at Brighton. However, it might have been worse.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

CHAPTER VII

LAST YEARS

Middle Age—Continued Prosperity—A Record of Work—*In Far Lochaber*—James R. Osgood—Failing Health—*Donald Ross of Heimra*—The Copyright Controversy—Mr. Kipling's Poem—Loss of Friends—The Royal Academy Club—Last Visit to the Oykel—Serious Illness—*Wild Eelin*—A Question of Taste—Black's Views on Religion—Hereditary Influences—Revolt from High Calvinism—The End of His Work—Last Appearance at the Reform Club—Messages of Comfort—Death, December 10, 1898—The Black Memorial Beacon.

THE years were speeding swiftly with Black at this time, as with most of us when we have come to middle age and to the settled routine of every-day life. Even a novelist, who lives upon his imagination, and whose lot it is to weave fairy-tales for the delight of other people, has to taste of the monotony of existence like less fortunate mortals whose business lies in stocks and shares, or corn or cotton. Black, as I have sought to show, never took the work of his imagination lightly. To him it was always something serious and real, and the years made no difference in the hold which it had upon his life. But he continued to be the most systematic of men, and each year as it passed saw the completion of its appointed task. Thus 1887 and 1888 produced the *Adventures of a House-*

boat and *In Far Lochaber,* while 1889 bore fruit in the *New Prince Fortunatus* and *The Penance of John Logan.*

Stand Fast, Craig Royston! represents the product of 1890; *Donald Ross of Heimra* that of 1891. *Wolfenberg* was produced in 1892; *The Handsome Humes* in 1893; *Highland Cousins* in 1894; *Briseis* in 1896; and *Wild Eelin,* the last of a long list, in 1898. It is an amazing account of work when one comes to sum it up in this fashion, and it places Black among the most prolific, as he certainly was among the most gifted, of British novelists. But all these volumes, all these countless pages, were produced with such undeviating regularity, such systematic industry, that the effect of the story of his life during these years of successful effort could hardly fail to be monotonous were it to be told in detail. Year by year the same months were given to the production of the book appointed for that particular year; year by year there was the spring visit to Scotland for the salmon-fishing, and the autumn stay at Oban, or some other chosen retreat where friends were made welcome to the family circle, and Black's high spirits asserted themselves in boisterous though innocent revelry. The reader must picture for himself the life he led in those days. It was a life of happiness, of prosperity, of hard, successful work. Not that the work was always upon the same level. It is no purpose of mine, in telling the story of my friend's life, to constitute myself his critic. I am well aware—no one better—that during those prosperous years in which

Black grew into middle age, and the gray hairs began to mingle with the brown on his head, he had ceased to attract the attention of the outer world as he did in the days of his youth. New fashions had arisen in fiction, as in everything else, and the critics were inclined to the belief that the author of *A Princess of Thule* had done his best, and that henceforward his books did not demand the serious notice which they had once obtained. For the most part, however, these books possessed the old merits, with one exception — the novelty which had given so much of freshness and of interest to his earlier efforts.

Yet even now, when Black had given the public so much that some readers experienced a feeling of satiety, he was quite capable of astonishing the critics by efforts that showed how far his powers were from being on the wane. In the list I have just given, I mention one little story that furnishes a case in point. This was *The Penance of John Logan.* A short story was wanted in a hurry by an editor whose arrangements had somehow or other miscarried. In his extremity he applied to Mr. Watt, the well-known literary agent, and Mr. Watt, in his turn, went to Black. I know not what arguments he used to move Black to depart from his regular routine; but at last he succeeded in winning a reluctant promise that the story should be written, and written at once. And Black never broke a promise. He sat down there and then, and in four days *The Penance of John Logan* had been written, from the first word to the last. And

what is *The Penance of John Logan?* I would advise any one who associates Black's name only with his earlier and more famous works to turn to the volume in which this story is told, if he wishes to see with what genuine force and breadth and perfect execution Black could write to the end of his days. Swiftly as his pen moved over the paper during the hours that he devoted to this story, there is no trace of slovenliness in its pages. The workmanship is as good as in anything that he ever wrote. Among those who were moved to enthusiasm when it appeared was no less competent a critic than Mr. Swinburne, and from the lips of the poet I had the avowal that in his opinion it held the first place among short stories in English fiction. I believe that if, in these years, when Black had to meet new conditions and a new generation, he had not produced so many novels, with such undeviating punctuality, those which he did give to the world would have been received, even by the superior young critics who professed to look upon him as old-fashioned and out-of-date, with an ample recognition of the fact that they maintained the high standard which their author had himself set before the world. Apart from the critics, it must be said, however, that Black was one of the happy writers who can always keep their circle of readers. Moreover, like some other great artists, he found, as I have already pointed out, in the New World an ever-widening band of admirers long after familiarity had lessened his vogue in the Old. Between 1882 and 1898 no fewer than five of his novels ap-

peared first in *Harper's Magazine*, and there was no sign, to the very last, that his popularity in the United States was waning. He thus continued, to the sincere delight of his personal friends, to be a successful author to the end. The life of the successful man of letters when success has been attained, when the early struggles are at an end, and when no sudden catastrophe comes to break up the career, is apt to have a sameness that detracts from the interest of a biography. So these years of regular and well-remunerated toil on the part of Black, when he had made himself secure in his own kingdom, and had neither desire nor necessity to look with envious eyes upon other monarchs in other realms, are not years that need detain us here. Yet one may cull from this happy and tranquil stage of his existence a few characteristic letters that show what he was to the end, how youthful in heart, how full of the joy of living.

To Miss Morten.

PASTON HOUSE,
Friday (1885).

MY DEAR DOLL,—I am very glad you think so; for these three instalments read to me most infernally dull. And No. 3 is worse, but No. 4 (April) wakes up a little; for then my American young woman comes in. I haven't put too much Giraffe into her, but just Giraffe enough. But I've given up story-writing and taken to poetry. Bless you, it's as easy as anything. Just you look at the other side and you'll see. I can see the Baba at this moment ramping up and down a long, green enclosure beneath the windows. I am informed that this represents General

Gordon escaping from Khartoum, that Mabs is Sir Redvers Buller, and Norman — who has got himself wounded on the cheek — General Stewart. Chiggy, I suppose, is the newspaper correspondent.

Yours always,
W. BLACK.

A BALLAD

The kirkyard mould is on my head,
But a fire is in my heart.
O Mary Mother, have pity on me,
And let my soul depart.

O, is she dead, or does she live,
That wrought this woe on me,
That neither heaven nor hell is mine,
And in the dark I dree?

Yestreen I thought I heard her step,
A flame went through my breast:
"O, is she come to say the word,
Will let my soul have rest?"

But never she thinks of Girvan's banks,
And never of Afton's bowers;
Nor of the nights her heart beat wild
Till the wan morning hours.

But ever her eyes are angry red,
And her cheeks are white and white,
God's Mother, I pray you pardon me,
And let my soul take flight!

It's heaven or hell that I would seek,
If my true love is not there—
My false love that did murder me
On the bonny banks of Ayr.

To Mr. Crerar.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
November 17, 1887.

MY DEAR CRERAR,—Curiously enough, I had been thinking of writing to you for some days before getting your letter and its flattering enclosure; but I have been desperately busy since getting back from the Highlands. We returned towards the end of last month, having spent all the summer and autumn in the north. As our holidays there seem to be growing longer and longer, I shouldn't wonder if it ended in our going and staying there altogether, though, to be sure, it is very handy to be so near to London as Brighton is, and I suppose the children's education can be more easily managed in the south. I hope my next story will interest you. It is all about Fort William —the title *In Far Lochaber*. It will begin in *Harper's Magazine* in January.

With very kind regards from all of us,

Yours sincerely,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

BALLIFEARY, N. B.,
August 26, 1888.

MY DEAR CRERAR,—I have hardly had time to acknowledge your bounty with regard to the *Celtic Magazine* and the *Bookbuyer*, for I have been so busy since coming here; but I now do so with hearty thanks. We are settled here for the autumn in a very prettily situated house just overlooking the Ness; but, later on, I am going away, up into Ross-shire, to pursue the wary stag. Then, towards the end of October, my wife and I go over to Dublin, to be with Miss Mary Anderson during her farewell week there before she returns to America. I knew you would like *In Far Lochaber* for its associations, but you will find it more interesting as a story further on. Tell your

critic from me that he is a forlorn ass. Of all song-birds the mavis is the earliest in the morning, beginning just a little after the sparrows have started their chirping.

To the same.

REFORM CLUB, LONDON,
December 23, 1889.

MY DEAR CRERAR,—This comes wishing you a happy and prosperous New Year and the best of health and spirits. I ought to have acknowledged a week ago the receipt of the beautiful photographs (for which let me now express the most grateful thanks), but I have been dreadfully busy—counting almost every hour. For again this March I hope to be off to the Oykel, and it will take me all my time to worry through. If you have been looking at *Prince Fortunatus*, the two rivers described in it are the Oykel and its tributary, the Einig. In your next letter tell me more about yourself, your health, and business prospects. We are all pretty well here. J. R. Osgood goes down with me to-morrow to spend Christmas with us.

Ever yours sincerely,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

November 31, 1890.

MY DEAR CRERAR,—Just a hurried line to thank you for your letter and for the verses, which strike a welcome note. I had no idea it was fourteen years since I was in America. The name Sheila, since it first appeared in *A Princess of Thule* has been given to babes innumerable, to yachts, house-boats, race-horses, greyhounds, cottages, and I don't know what else. But I draw the line at giving it to the heroine of a novel—at least, literary etiquette would. For my own part I don't care one brass farthing if there were twenty writers advertising themselves as "the author of Sheila." *Craig Royston* has been written and sent to the printers long ago; but I find that Ross *is*

mentioned in it, and so is Sutherland—once or twice. I hope no one will try to identify any of the personages introduced into a description of a Burns anniversary meeting in New York—they are all entirely imaginary.

In great haste,

Yours sincerely,
WILLIAM BLACK.

There was no one at this period in Black's life with whom he was on terms of greater intimacy than with Mr. Osgood, of whom mention has already been made. Between the novelist and the brilliant American, whose premature death caused such deep and wide-spread grief, a friendship akin to that of brothers sprang up. The letters which Black wrote to Osgood show not only the warmth of his affection for his friend, but the steady yet slow failure of his own physical powers which had now set in. I insert some of them without further comment.

To J. R. Osgood.

BRIGHTON,
Friday (*Dec.*, 1886).

MY DEAR OSGOOD,—I am exceedingly vexed that I shall not be able to join your dinner-party of Tuesday. The chill that I tried to drive off on the principle of *solvitur ambulando* on Sunday last has now got a fair grip of me, and I write this in bed. Not that I am so very ill off, though, after all. I am in the Blue Room that you know, and lamps are lit, and a fire blazing; and I have just had some Scotch broth and brown sherry, and I've got heaps of magazines, and also Lang's volume of short stories—I rather like it; but I would better have liked to have got

up to Jermyn Street next week. I hope this will reach you in time for you to get a fortunate substitute, and with many apologies and regrets, I am,

Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

Some kind person has just sent me that paragraph about Abbey's clog-dancing; so I suppose it was meant maliginantly. Poor devil!

To the same.

BRIGHTON,

March 6, 1887.

MY DEAR OSGOOD,—Alas, I dare not go out to dinner just at present, and by the 1st of April I hope to be in the far wilds of Scotland. But won't you come down here next Sunday? I have asked Harte, Wemyss Reid, and Shepard, who is U. S. Consul at Bradford, and have promised them an early dinner, so that they can get up by the evening express, and be fresh for their Monday's engagements. They will all be coming down by the 10.45. Do come. I shall want two tickets for the Kinsmen affair;* but goodness knows if I shall be able to crawl up to London.

Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

REFORM CLUB,

March 30, 1887.

MY DEAR OSGOOD,—If your number is complete for Friday, I hope you will frankly tell me so; even as I make honest confession that I should very much like to dine with you. I have been unexpectedly detained in town

* The Kinsmen were a small society of Englishmen and Americans who dined together once a year, sometimes in London and sometimes in New York, with the object of promoting the union of the two branches of the Anglo-Saxon race.

by a damnable conspiracy of doctors; but it's only for a week, and if you can find a corner for me without encumbering your table, I should be delighted to have an evening with you boys before I go off north. But as I declined your invitation with thanks, so now you may decline mine, and we will not quarrel.

Yours ever,
WILLIAM BLACK.

The following letter to his "beloved physician" throws light upon the state of his health at this time:

To Dr. Lauder Brunton.

OYKEL BRIDGE, LAIRG, N. B.,
April 16, 1887.

MY DEAR BRUNTON,—It was very kind of you to answer my last letter, though I am sorry you took the trouble; and I hope you won't answer this one. I write because I promised to let —— know through you what was the result of his massage performance. If he was at all doubtful, his half-expressed fears have been fulfilled, for after an obvious improvement produced by the first two days, this beast of a thing has got worse instead of better, so that at present I can scarcely do more than crawl across the room. But look at the compensations!

1. The long-continued fine weather has completely stopped the fishing, and while my companions fret and fume and cuss and swear at the sunlight, I sit contentedly in it and read a book.

2. The pain I suffer in my ankles isn't half as bad as the agony inflicted on me by my masseur friend—all in the way of kindness, no doubt.

3. The flash of fire that shoots along my palm when I reach out to take hold of anything teaches one not to be overgrasping.

Finally, and to conclude, I myself (as apart from these wretched extremities) am in excellent health. The weather is lovely, the scenery is beautiful, and all I have to look forward to is this: that if the fresh air and idleness of this place don't put me on my legs again, which they probably will, I shall be returning in about ten days or so to Brighton, where I shall confine myself to a sofa and live on slops and soda-water for three weeks to see how that will do. Then, if it won't do, I'll have my legs sawn off at the knees and present the lower portion to the College of Surgeons. I'm getting sick and tired of them; in fact, we are no longer on speaking terms. Now don't answer this note. I'll let you know further when I get to Brighton, and with kind regards, and remembrances to Ferrier,

I am,

Yours very faithfully,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To J. R. Osgood.

CORRANMORE, OBAN,

August 12, 1887.

MY DEAR OSGOOD,—Any time would suit us, but if you come up at the end of the month you would probably find Parsons in occupation of our solitary spare bedroom, if he is well enough to stand the change of climate. However, I dare say you and your friend would endure putting up for a night or two at the hotel next door for the delectability of having A. P. with you on one or two of the small trips, and perhaps you might travel from London together. But you must not arrange to have the Sunday, which is a *dies non* in the Highlands, form part of your Oban stay; for you want a day at Staffa and Iona before going on. In fact, you are trying to do too much in rushing the English lakes (which are at the best only pretty: Lake George —Killarney—Como—chromo-lithographic kind of things) and the Highlands together in so short a time. You

will be like the two American tourists whom the Harpers have commissioned to describe the west Highlands in pen and pencil during their autumn trip. Mong Dew! I pity them. But probably they won't understand, and what they see will suffice for their immediate requirements, and they won't know what they are missing. The west Highlands *à la mode de* Frank Stockton! I brought Bret Harte up here once; but he spent most of his time in the smoking-room of the hotel, and there he showed his wisdom. Yes; I'll go up the "great glen" with you—that you can rush with impunity. It's the conventional landscape business. I hope you'll have good weather.

Yours sincerely,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

OBAN,

September 1, 1887.

MY DEAR OSGOOD,—It seems rather odd for me to write you to visit us in the Highlands, and then to acquiesce in your going to a hotel; but, of course, we didn't expect you and Parsons would be coming up at the same time. However, the conjunction of two such fortunate planets will cause all minor considerations to take a back seat, and the result of your going to the Alexandra will be that we shall have two houses to paint red instead of one. . . . I sent you the corrected proofs the other day, and may God forgive those printers for having destroyed my manuscript. I have two other instalments ready; should I send them to you to be safely locked up, or would you despatch them to America? I am very well content with this story, so far as it has gone. There is plenty of material in it, which always makes the thing easier to write. . . .

Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

The story referred to in the above was *In Far Lochaber*. The writing occupied the usual space of time in the autumn and winter months, and as it was published in America by the Messrs. Harper, Black necessarily saw a good deal of Mr. Osgood while it was in progress. In November they went on a little tour together to Canterbury and the isle of Thanet, and Black wrote some humorous verses to celebrate a pilgrimage that was not without its convivial side.

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF PILGRIM JAMES

'Twas James set forth on pilgrimage
To Canterbury's shrine.
Oatmeal, he swore, should be his food,
And water pure his wine.

And holy thoughts should fill his soul,
From morning until even,
Till earth should but a ladder be
For stepping into heaven.

But Sussex maids are wondrous fair,
Witches in Kent there be;
They smiled and ogled, laughed and talked,
And, oh, my! didn't he!

In Canterbury's sacred town,
As everybody knows,
There is the famous Fountain Inn—
That fountain flows La Rose.

La Rose by day, La Rose by night;
It flowed and flowed and flowed,*

* But for James only.

Till Pilgrim James resumed his staff,
And once more took the road.

O ancient fanes! O walks and drives!
Snow-storms with sunshine blent;
O snugness of the way-side inns!
O kindly maids of Kent.

The strangest country e'er was seen!
For scarce three days were fled,
When all of it appeared to be
Painted a deep, rich red.

'Twas James he threw aside his staff:
"No more I mean to roam,
I've wandered east, I've wandered west,
But *now* I've found my home!"

Early in March, 1888, the writing of the story was finished, and Black set off at once to his fishing quarters in Scotland.

To James R. Osgood.

REFORM CLUB, LONDON,
March 13, 1888.

DEAR JAMES,—(If you are up yet). Here's the last of *Lochaber* (*Gott sei dank*). But I would rather not worry H. & B. for a check; let the heaven-born inspiration come of itself—any time during the year. I'm off from Euston to-morrow evening at eight. If you should happen to be wandering around in that neighborhood, look in, and we will shed a parting tear.

Yours ever,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To Mr. R. S. Williams.

PASTON HOUSE,
May 10, 1888.

MY DEAR WILLIAMS,—Some day, when Mrs. Williams is in an *awful* good-humor (you won't have to wait very long), I wish you'd ask her to be so kind as to tell me this: Supposing two young people—a young man and a young woman—have been studying music under the same master abroad, and there is an interval of a year or two, and they meet again, then what difficult piece of music would the young woman choose to show what advance she had made in the mean time, and what would be the special quality of her execution that would command his admiration? Then, on *his* side, what would be the kind of things he would practise—say, of a morning—in the case of his singing every evening in a comedy-opera? Or would he practise at all? And what was that unholy-looking drink that was in Mrs. Williams's room that evening at the Avenue? That pale-green fluid. Would a man have the courage to drink that stuff? I hope you are both well and flourishing. I think I caught a glimpse of you at the Academy Private View, but I was button-holed just at the moment. We go up to town to-morrow to see some of those artist folks who are all running riot in idleness and revelry at the present time; but thereafter, when we get settled down here, I hope we shall be able to persuade Mrs. Williams and you to pay us a flying visit.

Yours ever,
WILLIAM BLACK.

It was natural enough that Black's own letter-bag in those years of fame and ease should contain many appeals from less fortunate persons, and, above all, from those who were following, or attempting to follow, the calling of letters. Black,

as the reader must have already seen, did not wear his heart upon his sleeve, and to the outer world he seemed to be the last man who could be easily moved by a mere appeal to his charity. Yet in this, as in other matters, he hid his real self from the stranger, and, as a matter of fact, he was constantly ready to respond to these calls upon his sympathy, not merely by gifts of money, but by serious attempts to assist unfortunate writers. Here is one of many letters which I received from him, illustrating this side of his character:

To Wemyss Reid.

BALLIFEARY,
August 18, 1888.

MY DEAR REID,—I send by this post a specimen tale by that unfortunate man whose letter I forwarded to you the other day. If you can find anything for him to do you would be rewarded in heaven; but I confess my own impression is that he is one of the many miserable wretches who have mistaken their vocation in life. I enclose his second letter that you may have his address.

Ever yours,
WILLIAM BLACK.

The second letter alluded to above was a grateful acknowledgment of the pecuniary help Black had given to his correspondent.

To James R. Osgood.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
March 7, 1889.

DEAR JAMES,—I'm afraid you're having a twister of a voyage. However, by the time this reaches you you will be on American soil, and I hope to goodness you will remain

there some time, and give us all a chance of recovering. You remember you suggested a fortnight as the time I should give the *Graphic* people to decide; but I'm not going to do that. If you have a chance of a private talk with J. W. H. you might tell him what I told you about Miss Peggy as a grass widow, and the Mediterranean and Greek Archipelago; and if it strikes him that this would be an attractive feature for the magazine of 1891, they might send me a simple "yes" by telegram, and I should then be in a position to make arrangements and reply to the *Graphic*. I know the latter would prefer my doing something of the same kind with regard to a voyage to Australia; but the idea doesn't recommend itself to me in any aspect whatever. I think Miss Peggy ought to be popular in an American magazine; she appears to have been sufficiently so over here. There is no absolute necessity for illustrations; but of course such a scheme would give abundant opportunities to such a man as Reinhardt; and while I am talking business, could you find out whether it would be equally convenient for Franklin Square to begin publishing *Prince Fortunatus* in the third week of July next, instead of the first? This is a private request made by the *Graphic* to suit their own arrangements. I don't care about it one way or the other. As you know, the story is written.

Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

P.S.—Of course, there would be new characters in that Mediterranean-Grecian trip; the only ones transferred from the *House-boat* would be the narrator, his wife, and the young American banjoist and mischief-maker.

To the same.

CORRANMORE, OBAN,

October 2, 1889.

MY DEAR OSGOOD,—The coach-house door that you put below your yachts and take into the saloon on occasion

has done its trick this time, and there's nothing more to be said beyond ordering the dinner—always a grateful task. Is the Reform Club open yet, and will the 21st suit you? If so, I will write and ask Abbey and Parsons and Millett, who, with Mosley, would make up the number. Are you still thinking of that other little picture of Lindsay MacArthur's, for if not, a brother-in-law of mine seems rather to fancy it. I would buy it, but can't afford it in these hard times.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
February 19, 1891.

DEAR JAMES,—I'm afraid you must have had a cold and comfortless passage across. The weather has returned here in full force. I wish it were in Hades, where it would be much appreciated. . . .

Commend me to those wild boys of Franklin Square, and to Laffan, Hutton, and all the others. Ask Tommy if he is still making comparisons, and tell old Higginson that the Queen can't sleep in her bed o' nights because of his disapproval of English ways.

Yours ever,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To the same.

LANGWELL LODGE, BY LAIRG, N. B.,
April 8, 1891.

DEAR JAMES,—Why this mysterious reticence? But I shall be back at the end of the month. In the mean time, could you discover whether it is possible to copyright *Donald Ross of Heimra* in America? I had intended it to end with the end of June in the *Daily Chronicle*, and Marston had got from the proprietors permission to publish the three volumes about the middle of June. But I dare say

Messrs. Lloyd wouldn't mind my altering the arrangement of the final chapters, so that the story would run two months into July; and Marston would then publish in late August as he had originally intended. But would the fact of these final chapters being published subsequent to the coming into operation of the Copyright Act obtain copyright in the United States for the book, or only for these particular chapters? And, in the latter case, would H. & B. consider that a sufficient protection? I can find no solution of these conundrums in the act itself. I have already had one or two proposals from publishers on the other side; but, of course, I can say nothing until I hear what H. & B.'s suggestion is.

Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

P.S.—I have a short story, called "The Magic Ink," which will appear in *Good Words*, January and February, 1892. It is in four chapters. Could H. & B. find a place for it in one of their serials, or should I sell the American rights to Tillotson, who has an American syndicate?

The reference to the American Copyright Act draws attention to an event of importance in the life of Black, as in the lives of most English novelists of the day. Like most English writers popular in America, Black secured some profit as well as full security for his rights from the passing of the act; but, unlike many of his contemporaries in England, he did not feel that he had any grievance against the American publishers who had issued his works when they were still unprotected by the law. His relations with the Harpers, as many of the letters I have given prove, had always been most friendly, and his treatment by them had left

him nothing to complain of. With characteristic eagerness he rushed into print, when a general attack was made upon the American publishers, in order to defend those with whom he had been personally connected; and his chivalrous defence of the Harpers in particular excited no little attention when it was given to the world. Sir Walter Besant and Mr. Thomas Hardy were associated with Black in this proceeding, the immediate result of which was to bring down upon their heads a remonstrance from Mr. Rudyard Kipling in the shape of a poem, of which the first stanza is as follows:

. . . At the close of a winter's day
Their anchors down, by London town, the three great captains lay;
And one was Admiral of the North, from Solway Firth to Skye,
And one was lord of the Wessex coast, and all the lands thereby,
And one was Master of the Thames from Limehouse to Blackwall,
And he was the Captain of the Fleet, the bravest of them all.

The controversy was not very exciting, but it had, at all events, the result of making still more friendly the relations between Black and his American publishers. Writing to Mrs. Black, Mr. Joseph W. Harper made the following reference to Black's action: "Mr. Black, in his straightforward, simple, and withal gracious and graceful way, did my house a great favor a few weeks ago, by joining with two of his brother authors in a gallant knightly act, for

which the house endeavored to thank him and them. The thanks were inadequately expressed, but I was sure your husband would feel how honest was the intention. It would be but sorry compliment to him to say that I was unprepared for or could be in the least taken aback or 'rattled' (Dr. Murray in his new dictionary has not got down to this American use of 'rattled,' meaning discomposed or flustered) by any manly, generous act of his; but I must say that I am proud of the friendship of such a man, as I am of the friendship of all good men and women. It isn't everybody (man or woman) who loves your husband, which is most creditable to him; for, like all men tenacious of truth and fair play, he has his enemies among the ignoble. But I may say of him, as Thackeray said conditionally of dear Colonel Newcomb, 'everybody who knew him loved him; everybody, that is, who loved modesty and generosity and honor.'"

To J. Henry Harper.

GLENLYON LODGE, OBAN,
September 17, 1891.

MY DEAR HARPER,—I have to send you most grateful thanks for the salmon-rod, which I hear has safely arrived at Brighton; and also for the two books on fishing, which I have read with great interest. Mr. Wells (with whose name I was already quite familiar) will find me a willing convert to his theories, if only they will work out in practice; that is to say, I have not the slighest wish to labor away with the seventeen-foot rod, if a fifteen-and-a-half-foot one will do the work equally well. We will see next spring—in that blessed northern region, which has none of the black

flies, mosquitoes, or other of those pests which H. P. W. describes so feelingly. I am exceedingly glad you like the picture. It will no doubt surprise some people, for not only is it unconventional in manner, but also it deals with a condition of atmosphere which I have never seen elsewhere than in the west Highlands. The picture is *true*. You may take my word for it—true in color, in light, and in the sharp vividness of the glancing water. There is, perhaps, a trace of Colin Hunter in the treatment; but it is none the worse for that; and it has original qualities of its own. Then the sudden squall of rain on the left of the composition. You may never know, as we have known this summer, how characteristic that is of this country! It has been the wettest, the most incomprehensible season we have ever experienced in the Highlands; my aneroid has been vainly endeavoring to follow the changes of the weather, and now has stopped stock-still in disgust. Has the "Royal and Ancient Game of Golf" been introduced into America? It is a noble pastime, though rather conducive to profane swearing. It is making rapid headway in England—becoming a popular craze, indeed. James I., who carried it with him from Scotland, would be astounded at the number of clubs and associations now springing up all over the country. Good-bye, and renewed thanks! We are off for the south again at the end of the month. Please give our kindest regards to all your home circle.

Yours very sincerely,

WILLIAM BLACK.

The picture referred to above was a painting by Mr. Lindsay MacArthur, of Oban, which Mr. Harper had commissioned Black to purchase for him. Mr. MacArthur was a young artist in whose work Black took the deepest interest, and whose fortunes he was always anxious to promote.

Black was engaged at this time in revising his works for publication in a cheap edition.

To W. B. Dean, Esq.

BRIGHTON,
February 5, 1892.

MY DEAR SIR,—I am glad you approve of the cheap edition, though, to tell you the truth, the labor of going over those earlier works, altering phrases here and there, and in some cases even rewriting whole passages, is a desperate business. Had I known, I probably should not have undertaken it; now I am bound to go on. *Love or Marriage* has been out of print for many years. I dropped it, not on account of any views it propounded, or any "social problems" it touched (so far as I can remember, it did neither the one nor the other), but simply because it was an immature and unsatisfactory production. It is not the only one of my early novels which I have refused to reprint in any cheap edition. May a kindly mother-earth quietly bury the originals away out of sight—turning them to dust as rapidly as possible.

Yours very faithfully,
WILLIAM BLACK.

In 1892 a rude blow was struck at Black's little circle of intimate friends and companions. In the spring of that year James Osgood died, after an illness which had lasted for some months. Black's association with him had been so close that it would be difficult to exaggerate the severity of the loss thus inflicted on him. His friends had for some years been accustomed to see him chiefly in the society of Mr. Osgood, and of one or two other men who belonged to the same little circle. I think that after Osgood's death Black never cared to come to

London so frequently as he had once done, and he withdrew more and more from general society. This withdrawal was not, however, altogether due to the loss of old friends with whom he had been in the habit of associating. He himself was suffering from a steady decline of nervous force which made him feel more and more unequal to the requirements of social life. From this period forward, indeed, there is a distressing frequency in the allusions in his letters to various attacks of illness, not always serious in themselves, but quite sufficient to prevent his enjoyment of the society of his friends, and to forbid his visiting London for months at a stretch. It is noticeable, however, that whatever his physical or nervous condition might be, he allowed nothing to interfere with what had now become the two absorbing interests of his life—his work, and his spring fishing in Scotland. In 1892 he did, indeed, give himself a holiday from his usual Scotch visit. He once more went for a cruise in the Mediterranean with his wife and children. He had made such a trip in 1890, going as far as the Crimea, and had greatly enjoyed the sea-life and the new scenes to which he was introduced. Now in 1892 he spent two months in a cruise about the Italian shores and the Greek islands. Just as his former tour had provided for him materials which he used in the story of *Wolfenberg*, so this second and last cruise furnished him with scenes that were subsequently described in *Briseis*.

This story, however, as its readers will recall, deals also with some of the familiar Scottish scenes

which to the last were dearer to him than the beauties of Greece or Italy. His spring fishing in 1894 enabled him to visit Banchory and Spean Bridge, and these places gave local color to many of the scenes in *Briseis*.

In the months that followed James Osgood's death, other sorrows of the same kind fell upon Black. He lost his old friend, John Pettie, the great painter, to whom he had long been bound by ties of the warmest friendship. Pettie was one of the most constant figures at the dinner-parties which Black was in the habit of giving at the Reform Club—in the room where, before his day, Thackeray had been wont to entertain his friends —and on many less formal occasions Black and he were to be found in each other's company, in the chambers at Buckingham Street, or at the private view at the Royal Academy. Pettie's death, following at too short an interval upon that of Osgood, visibly depressed Black's spirits. Yet a little later and another link with the past was broken by the death of his old friend and colleague, William Minto, his successor in the editorship of the *Examiner*. Minto had for a number of years been settled in Aberdeen as Professor of Logic at the University of that city, but he paid occasional visits to London, and Black retained his old regard for him.

To C. W. McIlvaine.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
March 14, 1893.

MY DEAR MCILVAINE,—I am sure you must have been very much shocked by the news of poor Minto's death,

even though you knew he was seriously ill. They say it was overwork, which I cannot understand, for the Scotch professors get about seven months' holiday in the year. However, there is another irreparable gap; fancy Osgood, Pettie, and Minto within so short a time. As Hunter says, "Death gets the pick." How are all the boys over there? I presume you have seen Alfred Parsons. Has William Laffan left for Europe? Give my kindest regards to J. W. H. and to J. H. H. when you see them, and tell the latter that I hope the storm in the Besant teacup has quieted down. Dolly is getting along fairly well; but it will be a tedious recovery, for she had so completely outgrown her strength, with her brain remaining abnormally active—that is, abnormally as regards her physical condition; but I have got Dunolly in the west Highlands for four months (June to September), and she will get all right there, with the freedom of the woods and the sea-shore. I am off on the 25th for a month's salmon-fishing in Ross-shire. Back for the private view of the Academy, when we may foregather again at the Reform.

Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To Wemyss Reid.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,

December 18, 1893.

MY DEAR REID,—I am sorry to hear you have had another touch of the mysterious pestilence, and hope you are quite better. "My little lot," as the music-hall song (quoted by Miss Mabel Black) says, has been simply an overflow of blood to the head, which nature promptly relieved by giving me a fortnight's hemorrhage from the nose. I thereupon followed the old lady's lead by adopting vegetarianism, teetotalism, and entire abstinence from tobacco, and I'm getting all right again, but cursing Cassell & Company for not continuing that extremely

handy edition of Scott's novels — 2*s.*, in scarlet cloth— which led off with *The Antiquary*. I am told they have been suffered to drop out of print, and it was an ideal edition to read in bed. When —— and —— come up for election, probably both on the same day, I hope you will do what you can for them. I fear it will be some time before I get up to London again.

Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

To Colin Hunter.

1893.

DEAR COLIN,—This confounded bleeding at the nose keeps recurring, and as I don't want you to find yourself sitting next a ghastly and gory spectacle at the Fly-fishers' to-morrow evening, I am writing to Morten to take over my responsibilities as host. You will find everything arranged, and if, in the mean time, a few ancient chestnuts should occur to me, I will forward them on for your delectation. Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

In an earlier chapter I have mentioned Black's friendship for the artists of his time, and the unique place which they seem to have accorded him in their affections. With Millais and Leighton he had long been on terms of friendly intimacy, but the men whom he knew best and with whom he was most familiar in the artistic world were, I think, his old Glasgow associate Colin Hunter, John Pettie, G. H. Boughton, Alfred Parsons, and Edwin Abbey. Through all the changes of his later years he clung to these distinguished artists like a brother; and his closeness of intimacy with them was in no way affected by his absorption in the American circle

of which I have spoken. Year by year, from the days of *A Daughter of Heth* onward, he had been one of the constant frequenters of the private views at the Royal Academy. He seemed, indeed, to be one of the established features at that annual function, always greeting his friends with the same quiet heartiness of manner, and ever to be found somewhere in the neighborhood of Pettie and Hunter. No man ever entered more completely into the interests and successes of his artist friends than Black did. Nobody was more anxious as to their fate in each recurring exhibition; no one rejoiced more heartily over their successes. After he went to live in Brighton, he made it a point every year, while his health permitted, to come to town in the first week in May; and if you went to his rooms on Varnishing Day, you were certain to find there a select knot of painters who had come to Buckingham Street after the completion of their labors at Burlington House. All the talk on these occasions was of art and artists, and it was then that Black talked, with the brilliancy I have mentioned on another page, of the paintings he had seen and admired. To the very last, the London season seemed for him to be comprised within the week or ten days immediately before and after the private view, and no one who met him at such times could have any doubt that on one side, at least, of his sympathies art still held the first place. More than once he was bidden to that high feast of the art-world, the Royal Academy banquet. I have already told the story of the way in which two of his neighbors, on one of these

occasions, displayed their absolute ignorance of his name and work. Incidents of this kind amused him greatly, for he was one of the happy men whose freedom from vanity saves them from a world of annoyance in their passage through life. On the Monday following the Academy banquet the members of the Royal Academy Club always hold their annual dinner. Black was one of the regular guests at this delightful entertainment, and here, at least, he was neither unknown nor unappreciated. One of his last appearances at the club dinner was in 1894, and the following letters refer to that incident:

To Colin Hunter.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
May 9, 1894.

DEAR COLIN,—I really must write and tell you what a pleasant evening Monday was—the pleasantest I ever spent at Greenwich. Perhaps there was the added consciousness that you had just sold a picture, and that the president had promised to find me a name for my new heroine—a modern Greek girl.

Yours ever,
WILLIAM BLACK.

To Miss Morten.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
May 9, 1894.

MY DEAR DOLLY,—About half the Royal Academy were up at Buckingham Street the other night, after the Greenwich dinner, and here is the ribald rhyme that was being handed round. It was a great evening, for Colin had sold a picture, and the president had promised to find me a fascinating name for my new heroine, who is

a modern Greek girl. Hugh has just sent me a beautifully shaped fresh-run fish of fifteen pounds (no doubt sixteen pounds when he caught it). It's loathsome! Why doesn't your father skelp away up there to the inn?

Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

(ENCLOSURE.)

Austin, Austin, Austin,
Dobbie, Dobbie, Dobbie,
Although making verses
Seems to be your hobby,
Stevenson could take you
And Gosse and Andrew Lang
And knock your heads together—
Bang—bang—bang!

Briseis was the name which, after some consideration, Sir Frederick Leighton suggested to Black for his heroine, and it was by this name that the novel, when it appeared, was called.

In 1895 Black went for the last time for the spring fishing on the Oykel. He was not in good health when he started, but the old love was strong within him, and the stormy north called him yet once more. His experiences from the first were not propitious.

To J. G. Morten.

LANGWELL LODGE, BY LAIRG, N. B.,

Thursday,

DEAR MORTEN,—It's well for you you're not in this confounded place. There's nothing here but howling gales and spates, sleet, hail, snow, and the most unendurable cold. Our communications were entirely cut off

yesterday; the men dared not try the ferry, and the wooden bridge was carried away last autumn. The coals you ordered never arrived, so I've sent for some to Inverness; but I think we shall all be frozen to death before they come. Parsons and I played poker yesterday from 10.30 A.M. till 11 P.M.; it was chiefly because poker was suggestive of a fire, and we tried to get warm that way. This morning he is away on a trap to Inver Oykel; but it's absurd to expect fish to come up in this Arctic weather.

Yours ever,

WILLIAM BLACK.

P.S.—After all, Hugh and I ventured out this afternoon, and butted ourselves against a hurricane. I broke my back thrashing torrents; then Hughie managed to hook a perfect devil of a fish in the Long Pool, then he (the fish) went careering over the falls into the Rock Pool, where he died the death. By guess-work he is about ten and a half or eleven pounds; so I think I will send him to you to-morrow, as you have a family with large appetites, while the Paston House people can't eat worth a cent. You might ask for him at Richmond Station on Sunday; perhaps they don't forward on Sunday like the London companies. Parsons just back—seen nothing; raining in torrents; another spate on. God help us all—this is a fearful country.

One of his intimate friends was Mr. R. B. Marston, the son and partner of his English publisher, Mr. Edward Marston. For both the Marstons Black entertained a warm feeling of esteem, while Mr. Robert Marston claimed his special sympathy because of his well-known enthusiasm as a fisherman. On not a few occasions Black received him as a guest at Langwell Lodge and Oykel Bridge,

and their common interests as author and publisher were strengthened by their community of taste in the matter of sport.

To Robert Marston, Esq.

OYKEL BRIDGE,
April 22, 1895.

MY DEAR MARSTON,—I have been so ill since I came here with the return of the Flue that I could not write and thank you for your great kindness with regard to that Northern Syndicate. I think you acted most judicially. Morten has done very well this year on the river; but I have had to spend most of my time lying on a sofa, and now, though I am getting a bit better, I can hardly write. . . .

Yours very sincerely,
WILLIAM BLACK.

As the above letter indicates, before he had been long at Langwell Lodge he had a return of one of his frequent illnesses, and it assumed a serious form. His wife was summoned to him, and she nursed him back to health—a slow and tedious process. He returned for a short time to Brighton, and then in the summer went to Inverness to recruit. He was weak and suffering, but his work went on just the same. His illness had been noticed in the papers, and the announcement brought many letters of sympathy and inquiry. One of them I shall quote. It is from a Scots school-master:

HONORED SIR (wrote his correspondent, May 1, 1895), —I am deeply grieved to see from yesterday's paper that you are lying ill in a lonely place in the far north. I know you through your novels; but that is enough for me. Deeply as I deplore the loss of Blackie, I thank God we have

still Black. May you soon recover and add still another volume to that long list of masterpieces (*e.g.*, *Madcap Violet*). Here am I off duty as teacher, confined to bed for weeks with sickness, but hoping soon to bask again in nature's smiles, and "teach the young idea how to shoot." If I could only hear that you are not very ill, I would be so glad. "A merry heart does good like a medicine." Robin says:

"The hert's aye the pairt, aye,
That maks us richt or wrang."

Excuse pencil and this note, which the *profanum vulgus* would call insanity.

I am,

Your well-wisher and sincere admirer,

In the autumn of the year 1895 Black was back again at Brighton, taking his usual walks, so far as his strength permitted, and working with his customary energy at his new story, which was to be his last, *Wild Eelin*. He came but seldom to London at this time, and when he did so none of those who knew and loved him could fail to see how he was aged, and how his nervous force had been weakened until it seemed to be almost spent. His hair was plentifully streaked with gray, and even in the company of his friends he was strangely subdued. But he made few complaints, and resolutely pursued his way as he had done in his prime.

To Mr. Crerar.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
December, 1895.

MY DEAR CRERAR,—We all thank you most heartily for the welcome packet of books; but why don't you send

us any news of yourself? I duly received the "snap" photograph, but couldn't make you out. By-the-way, do you happen to know a collection of Scotch songs, "The Minstrelsy of Scotland," collected by Alfred Moffat? If you don't, I shall be glad to send you a copy. But why I ask chiefly is that in this volume he gives a curious story about the finding of "The Banks of Loch Lomond" by a Lady John Scott, and I should so like to know if you ever heard the original. The present version, which has attained great popularity in this country, is impertinently spurious on the face of it—

"Where in purple hue the Hieland hills we view!"

But the refrain,

"And ye'll tak the high road,"

etc., is apparently genuine and very fine. When you write let me hear something more of yourself.

Yours very sincerely,
WILLIAM BLACK.

P.S.—Lady Francis Cecil, who is a sister-in-law of the Marquis of Huntley (the "Cock o' the North"), has just been so kind as to offer me some legends and rhymes of Deeside, which is extremely provoking, as I have finished my Deeside story.

To Colin Hunter.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
January 13th.

DEAR COLIN,—I am going to try to crawl up to London on Friday afternoon next, to look at Abbey's show the next morning. If you are not engaged on the Friday evening, will you come along to the Reform? We might have a crust of bread together, and a glass of filtered water.

Ever yours,
WILLIAM BLACK.

The following letter, which may not inappropriately be inserted on this page, refers to a little article he had written describing an interview which he had in the heyday of his early fame with Thomas Carlyle. He was fond of telling this story to his friends, and of repeating with gusto the question which the great man, after complimenting him upon his stories, and especially upon *The Strange Adventures of a Phaeton*, had addressed to him: "And when are ye going to do anything serious?" As I have said, Black was too free from vanity to be hurt by a remark which would have offended some.

To Sir John R. Robinson.

PASTON HOUSE, BRIGHTON,
November 6th.

MY DEAR ROBINSON,—Perhaps the Carlyle project had better drop. I should not like to append my name in full; for my object was not to seek notoriety for myself, but to give the public some interesting memoranda about a great man. I should not like to place myself in the same category with —— and ——, who have been battening on ——'s dead body ever since the poor chap died. Was there ever anybody so treated by both relatives and friends? Hardly had the telegram announcing his death reached London when —— and —— were racing each other in hansoms down to the *Times* office to get ——'s last letters to them printed. Then came the awful picture—the dead man with his arms propped up in bed, and his fingers clasped as if in prayer—to be photographed for publication. And then actually his private form of devotion was supplied to the papers, and they printed that

horrible piece of affectation in which he so plainly said: "Look here, God, isn't this a nice bit of English?"

I don't want to come into that crowd.

Yours sincerely,
WILLIAM BLACK.

I should not have printed this letter but for the light which it throws upon my friend's own character. The almost savage scorn with which he regarded affectation, whether in great writers or the humblest of the people about him, was all through his life one of his distinguishing characteristics. He himself had never posed—never from his earliest days to his last. He went, indeed, to the other extreme. If he did his work conscientiously and thoroughly, as was undoubtedly the case, he left it to speak for itself, and never invited the admiration of his friends or the outside world. He may have been wrong to treat the critics as he did; but his indifference to their praise and blame was a real indifference, and a most manly one. He never aspired to set up a school, or to attach himself to one, and he hated all mutual admiration cliques. Some may be startled by the strength of his indignation at the posturing and posing from which even a death-bed was not free, but it came from his heart, and it is right that the world should know it. In nothing is this outburst of feeling more characteristic than in the words which speak of the prayer given to the public almost simultaneously with the announcement of its writer's death. In Black's earliest days, in his home in Glasgow, he had been

taught that it was weak, unmanly, almost immoral, to allow the hidden emotions of the heart to be betrayed, although only in the intimacy of the family circle. So strictly was this rule observed in the Puritan household that it was applied even to the display of family affection. It was applied in a thousand times greater force to those more sacred feelings and emotions connected with religion and the things of the soul. In later years the traces of this earliest tradition of his life were readily to be discovered by all who met him. The reticence and reserve of which I have so often had to speak in writing of him were, in a great measure, the fruit of this early training. To the very last he remained, in one respect, what he had been as a boy. He could never speak with the freedom that some practise on questions of religion. Those who were nearest to him knew that he thought deeply upon such questions—knew, also, that if he had long since emerged from the narrow limitations of the creed of his childhood, he was yet a man possessed by a strong sense of the serious side of existence, and by that spirit of reverence for unseen things eternal in the heavens which may be described as the very essence of true religion. But to speak of such matters was impossible to him—impossible even in the presence of his dearest friends. The iron yoke of his race was laid upon his soul, so far as all such things were concerned, condemning him to a silence that was nearly, if not quite, unbroken. One can well imagine, therefore, how hateful seemed to him the opening of the heart's innermost recesses and most

sacred emotions in order to satisfy the insatiable curiosity of a vulgar world. Of course, Black's genuine shrinking from the kind of publicity which seems to be the breath of life to some modern writers has not simplified the task of his biographer. The letters which he wrote to his friends—and I have read more than a thousand of them—were not written with an eye to ultimate publication, as the reader must have discovered from the specimens printed in these pages. It was rarely that in writing, even to his intimate friends, he gave free vent to his feelings as in the letter to Sir John Robinson. But those who knew him intimately can bear testimony to the fact that such outpourings of his innermost feelings were not uncommon when he was in the company of men whom he trusted. And what a contrast he presented at such times to the Black of every-day life!

His own religious views may be gathered best from his story of *In Far Lochaber*. It was written in the fulness of his maturity, and in it he discusses with unwonted frankness some of the great problems of religion. The story is that of the daughter of a Presbyterian minister who becomes attached to a man, and all but betrothed to him, before she learns that he is a Roman Catholic. The girl has been brought up in the strictest of Calvinistic households, where life is tinged by the severity of a stern creed, and even the most innocent of pleasures are forbidden. Her first awakening from the rigid Puritanism of her early home comes when she visits a family of distant relatives in the Highlands, and

discovers that with them life is a thousand times more pleasant than in the form in which she had known it. "Here was no studied mortification of all natural enjoyment, no constant and anxious introspection, no dwelling upon death and judgment as the only subjects worthy of human concern. The ordinary incidents of the day seemed to be for them sufficient. A prevailing cheerfulness and good-humor attended both their occupations and their amusements, and if there were sharp words at times —especially when Aunt Gilchrist's peripheral neuralgia was wandering around—these sharp words left no morbid sting." Above all, in this new home-life, where dogmatic theology was unknown, there was a great kindliness of feeling, and everybody was unselfish. It is the contrast between the atmosphere of her early home and that of her new one which first leads the girl to think for herself on the nature of true religion, and enables her, when the time comes, to determine of her own free will the question of whether a difference of creeds ought to put an end to a strong mutual love. Black was thinking of his own early days in his home in Glasgow when he wrote the story of his heroine's experiences—just as he drew the sufferings of Aunt Gilchrist from peripheral neuralgia from his own tortures from the same disease. As I pointed out on a former page, the influence of the strict Calvinism in which he was brought up was strong upon him when he wrote his first book, *James Merle.* It had ceased to be anything but a memory when he wrote *In Far Lochaber,* and steeped the story

in that atmosphere of love and good-will and unselfishness in which he had come to recognize the essence of genuine religion. No doubt to some it will seem that he had wandered from the truth in thus turning his back upon a narrow and gloomy creed, but there are many who will feel with him that in abandoning the stern doctrines of his childhood he had entered upon a life not only fuller and more joyous, but far nearer to his own ideal of the truth. Let it be understood that in writing of the Presbyterian household, in which every natural instinct was repressed as being in itself something lawless, he never used any language that was scornful or contemptuous, but wrote as reverently of the father who held that he could not love God truly if he showed any demonstrative affection for his children as if he had himself believed in that terrible doctrine. Yet his own idea of religion was more nearly summed up in the saying of the Apostle James than in any of the writings of dogmatic theologians, from Calvin downward.

In 1896 he paid his last visit to Scotland, Inverness being the scene of his summer holiday. In the spring he had stayed at Norwood for some time, not far from his old home on Denmark Hill and the scenes he had described so minutely in *Madcap Violet*. In the winter he returned to Brighton, and to work upon *Wild Eelin*. But his health was visibly declining, and though the power of work had not left him, he found it more difficult to get through his task than he had ever done before. In 1897, for the first time since he had taken up his

abode in England, he had neither spring nor summer holiday, but spent the whole year in Brighton. He came but seldom to London, and was then careful to avoid any exciting scenes or large gatherings. In the early part of 1898 he wrote an autobiographical paper, entitled, "With the Eyes of Youth," for an American periodical. It was a touching and delightful sketch, which brought back to those who knew him many memories of his early days. This short article was the last work that he was able to complete.

To Robert Marston, Esq.

BRIGHTON,
January 2, 1898.

MY DEAR MARSTON,—You may be sure that your kindly wishes for the New Year are heartily reciprocated by this household, who also wish me to thank you for the welcome present of books. I fear that a book, and a chair near the fire, are more in my way now than salmon-fishing; but who knows? Morten has been making little inquiries here and there.

Yours most sincerely,
WILLIAM BLACK.

In the summer, after a holiday at Horsted Keynes, in Sussex, he made an attempt to begin a new novel, the plot of which he had already woven; but he never got further than the title, *Cherry*, and a four-lined verse which he wrote as heading to the first chapter.

In the month of August, on going into the Reform Club one day for luncheon, I was surprised to see him in his old seat at the familiar table. He had not occupied it for several years, and since he had

last been there James Payn, who always used to sit in the chair next to Black's, had died. I welcomed with joy his return to the old place. But quickly the shattered state of his health forced itself upon my notice. Since I had seen him last he seemed to have become almost an old man. The dark-brown hair was turned to gray; the nervous energy which had once distinguished him in all his acts and sayings was gone; his voice had lost its old resonance, and his speech was weak and slow. It was a pathetic sight. Yet in many respects he showed himself to be the Black whom I had known in long-past years, and he talked of old friends and old days with a depth of interest and affection that proved that his heart, at least, had undergone no change. We went up to the smoking-room after luncheon, and he sat beside me talking for some time about scenes and people of the past. But his weakness was great, and by-and-by he shook hands with me and went away, apparently exhausted by the exertion of conversation. That was the last visit he paid to the Reform Club, in which he had been for so many years a prominent figure; his last appearance in London, which he had entered first as an unknown youth, and where he had risen so high in fame; and the last time I ever saw him.

During those last years of slow but continuous decline he was not without some consolations that cheered him greatly in spite of physical pain and weakness. He still had constant assurance of the fact that he was not forgotten by the outer world. To the very last he continued to command his own

terms with the publishers, and whatever might be said or left unsaid by the critics, his own circle of readers at home was faithful to him, while on the other side of the Atlantic it continued to grow to the day of his death. Moreover, the postman still brought to Paston House those letters from unknown friends which made him feel that, after all, his work had not been in vain, so far as it had enabled him to touch the hearts and win the love of multitudes whom he never met in the flesh. Here, for example, is a letter from Cleveland, Ohio, dated February 26, 1898:

William Black, Esq.

DEAR SIR,—This is my letter of thanks for the great pleasure you have given me. For six weeks I have been in bed. On my bed in this time have been from one to three of your books. I read until weary, then dream—and read again. I thank you for the yachting cruises, where I have gone with you. I thank you for the pleasant acquaintance you have given me with most delightful people, whom, but for you, I should never have known. I thank you for helping me through these weary weeks. I thank God for sending you into this world.

Respectfully yours,

J. F. R.

The man who wrote thus from his own sick-bed undoubtedly brought comfort and joy to the bed of the man whom he addressed.

The end came, after a long period of suffering and complete withdrawal from the world, on Saturday, the 10th of December, 1898. He had just completed his fifty-seventh year. On the following

Thursday he was laid to rest in the church-yard at Rottingdean, where he had spent so many hours of quiet happiness in other days. The grave of Sir Edward Burne-Jones is within a few feet of the spot where Black was laid, and the sound of the sea which he loved may always be heard from the quiet resting-place. Among those who accompanied his body from Paston House to Rottingdean were not a few who had been Black's companions in the old days when he delighted in this walk along the cliff—his brother-in-law Morten, Colin Hunter, Sir Robert Giffen, E. D. J. Wilson, Sir John Robinson, Leatham Bright, Clarence McIlvaine, and the present writer. At the side of the grave Mr. Rudyard Kipling paid a last tribute of respect to a man whose name had become known wherever English works of fiction are read, and who, in his own method and style, and with his essential limitations, had won a reputation hardly inferior to that of any of his contemporaries. But those who stood beside Black's open grave on that mild December day when they parted from him, the old friends and comrades who had known him in obscurity and in fame, in strength and in weakness, were not thinking so much of the writer whose name had won world-wide recognition, as of the man. And there was not one of them who did not feel that they were taking a last farewell of one of the purest, manliest, most chivalrous souls the world has ever known.

Black's death drew many tributes to his talents as a writer and the character of his books from

the press. But better than any appreciations of this kind—better because furnishing a more trustworthy proof of his exceptional place in the esteem of the reading world—was the desire expressed by his admirers for the erection of some memorial of the affection and regard which he had inspired. A spontaneous movement among his readers in Great Britain and the United States led to the formation of a "William Black Memorial Committee," under the presidency of Lord Archibald Campbell. The subscriptions received by this committee have been expended in the erection of a beacon-light on Duart Point in the Sound of Mull. The light-house tower, which bears an inscription to his memory, was erected from designs by Mr. William Leiper, R.S.A., and has now been taken over by the Northern Lights Commissioners, to be maintained by them in perpetuity. The new beacon casts its rays over the waters where, in Black's most powerful story, the yacht of Macleod of Dare went down, and all around it are scenes which have not only been described again and again in his glowing pages, but amid which many of the happiest hours of his own life were spent. It would be difficult to imagine a more appropriate memorial to one whose pen was the first to bring to light the glories of the Hebrides, nor could a more fitting spot have been found on which to place it.

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